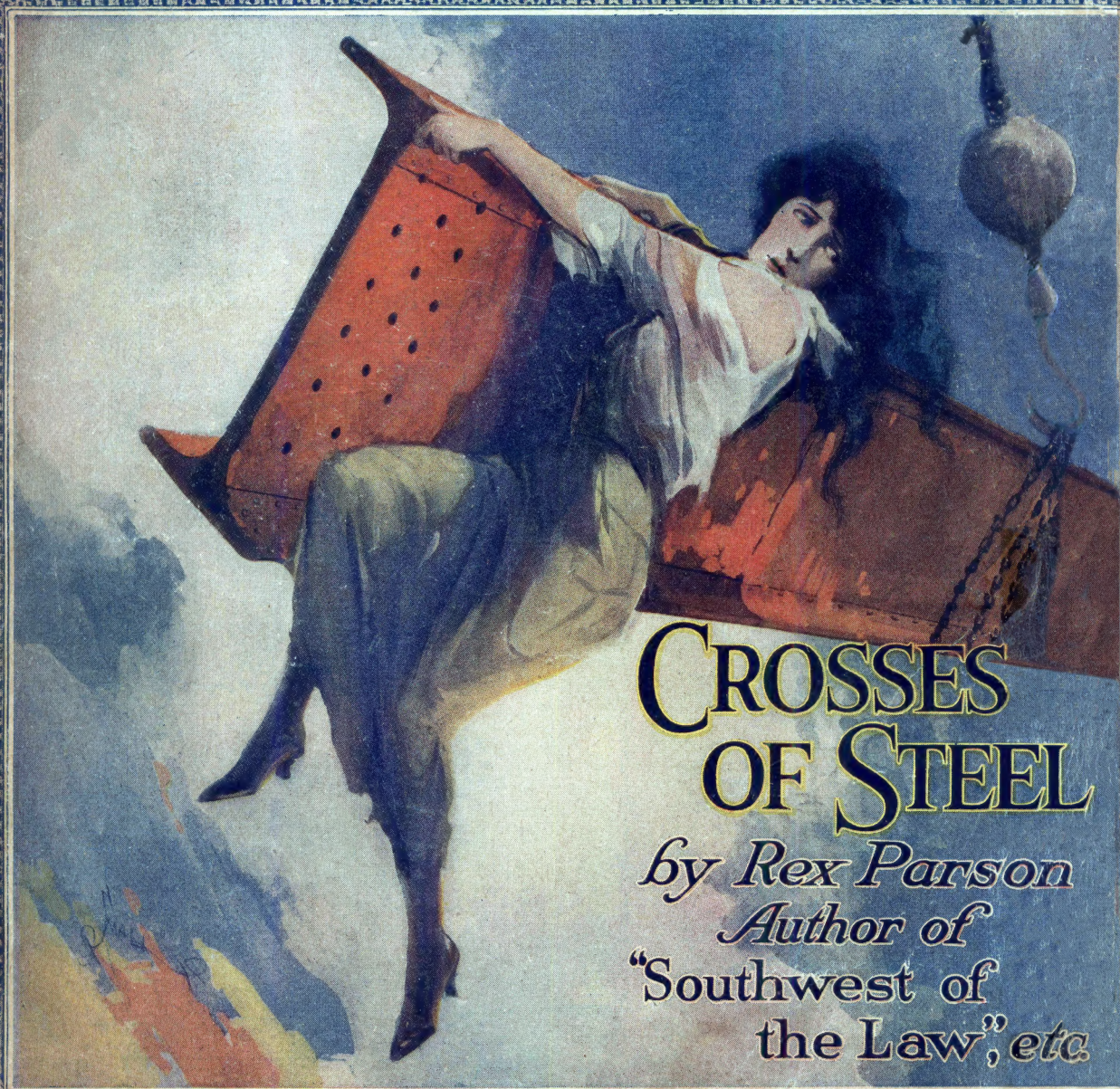


ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



CROSSES OF STEEL

by Rex Parson
Author of
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the Law", etc

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A COPY

SEPTEMBER

13

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A YEAR

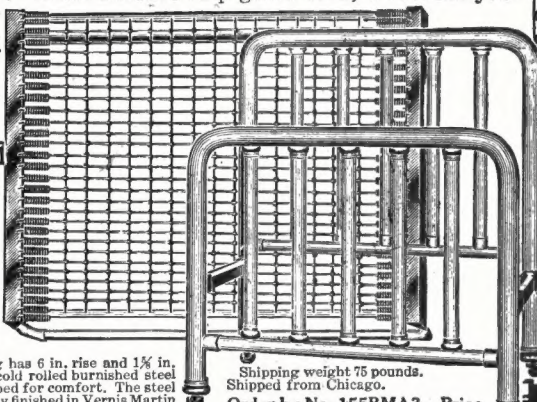
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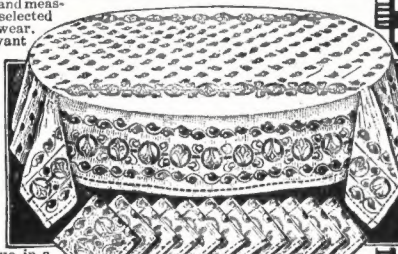
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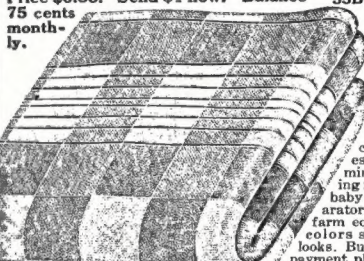
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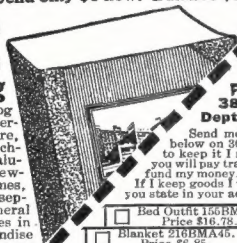


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THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXII

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 2

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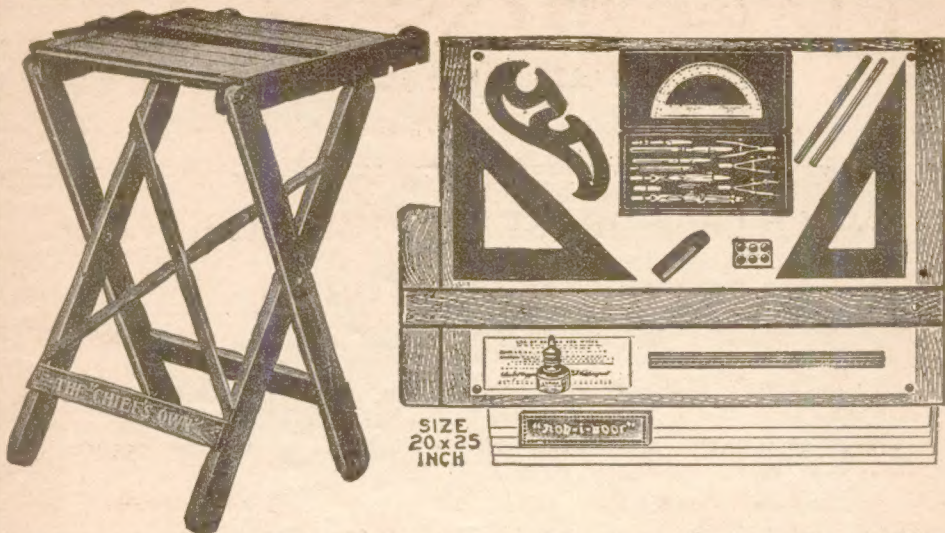
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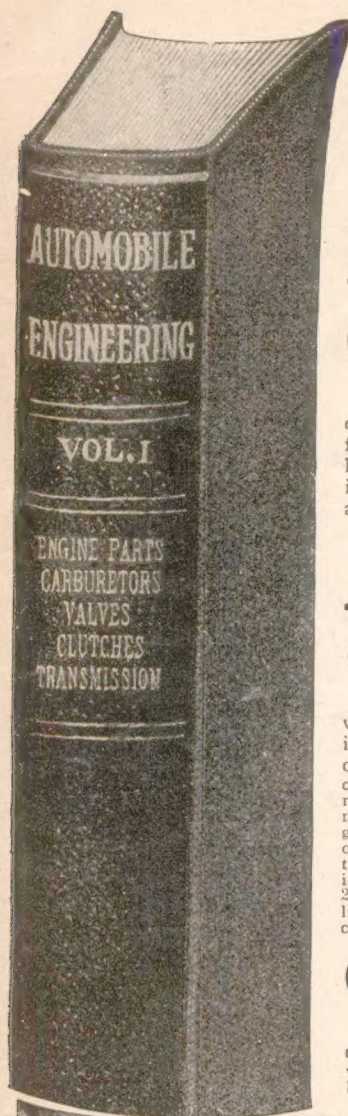
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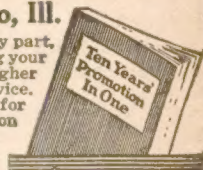
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No. 2



Crosses of Steel

by Rex Parson

Author of "Easy Garvin," "Southwest of the Law," etc.

CHAPTER I.

DUNCAN GROUT.

AT the bottom of the thousand-foot cañon boiled the turgid waters of an Amazonian tributary, grist of the eternal grind of tropic heat and the cold of snow-capped peaks. Five hundred feet up the perpendicular wall a niche had been blasted and chiseled on each side. From these radiated upward huge branches of latticed steel like the ribs of giant fans. They did not stand out at right angles from the walls, but slanted to the line of the river flow, the one from a point twice the cañon's width down-stream from the other.

Across the tops of the fans, cut off to absolute horizontal only a little below the level of the tops of the walls from which they protruded, ran the heavy girders for which the great ribs furnished, really, the braces to make them the arms of a Titanic bracket. The arms pointed directly toward each other, reached, day by day, a few feet nearer each other, nearer the completion of a mighty bridge.

One of these brackets was much larger

than the other, obviously intended to carry the weight of the bridge three-quarters of its length, its very parts, as they swung out on vast derricks, things to set one thinking of mythological giants, the whole, unfinished as it was, so massive in its strength one might wonder it did not excite the jealousy of the Maker of the cañon itself.

Over the topmost chord of the upper truss, clear across the cañon, in line with the centers of both double arms of the brackets, a huge cable was drawn tight and held at the ends by vast concrete bedding; under it moved two lighter cables to pull back and forth across it a conveyor, a sort of inverted truck on pulleys. That glorified ropeway, capable of sustaining a forty-ton weight suspended under the conveyor, was in itself an engineering feat.

On shore a stationary engine added its harsh roar to the din of pneumatic hammers, shrill-voiced native workers, creaking derricks, the roars of half a dozen other engines. A hoisting-machine rattled its gears and drum. The pulley on the under side of the conveyor turned its grooved wheels. Its mate below rose slowly from

the platform, its huge hook gripping a sling of chain around two twenty-foot I-beams. The beams, balanced horizontally, were lifted half a dozen feet above the level of the top chord of the bridge.

There was a pause in the hoist's rattle. It began again. Swiftly the heavy beams were borne away. On them stood a swarthy young Spaniard, lightly gripping the pulley hook with one hand, lightly waving a cigarette in the other.

Up to his ears came the mighty blend of sounds. Even the larshest of them were broken and softened by their own echoes until the whole seemed to harmonize into a mighty chord. Something about it caused the youngster's blood to tingle. He looked down.

Swiftly under his feet the plank staging between the rails of the bridge reeled away. He passed over a puffing engine and its derrick. A group of sweating laborers toiled with a beam. Farther down, balancing on the edge of a girder, a rivet-catcher raised himself on tiptoe and reached with his powder-can for a badly aimed, sizzling, white-hot rivet. He missed it. The rivet faded, too small to see, long, long before it reached the torrent below. The dark features of Antonio Goro spread in a grin. That was his job—over on the other side. And he would not have missed.

Another derrick rolled away from under him. He was nearly to the end of the big western bracket. Beyond that, for a thousand feet, he would travel with only ten long seconds of whirling space between him and whatever inferno there was below that brown-black roil of jumping waters. It was not of that he thought. His grin widened.

Two big men—one so much bigger than the other that the other's six feet looked almost insignificant—were standing on the last girder that had been placed. They were gringos—Americanos—but he held no malice. Surely this was a wonderful job they gave him, with superlative wages for work as pleasant as being a circus performer. But these were the superintendent of this side and, most interesting of all, the "beeg boss" of both superintendents. A little devil was in a hurry to get Antonio.

Antonio thought to disport himself for the big boss's entertainment. He let loose the hand that had steadied him on the pulley's hook.

They looked up. Antonio gaily waved his arms. The superintendent's lips framed "Damned fool!"

Antonio chuckled.

Then something happened. The locomotive of the material-train from Machala blew its infernal whistle—a note all out of tune with the vast harmony of the cañon. Antonio started. His hand gripped back for the pulley hook; he missed it. He clutched at the chain as he careened sideways, doubling to reach it.

His hand caught. It jammed between the chain and the edge of the I-beam. Antonio almost relaxed his hold. Then he thought of the ten long, whirling seconds—just of those, not particularly of the end of the tenth. They were enough.

Frantically he tried for a grip with the other hand. His pinched fingers would not lift his weight for an upward swing of his legs to clasp the beam between them. No, they would pull from their joint sockets, and—the ten seconds would begin to whiz past.

Todos santos! The engineer had stopped the thing. It oscillated back and forth. It cut deeper into his fingers. And now the accursed fool had started it back just at the wrong end of the swing. It was beyond endurance. Ten seconds down!

No—no—not that! *Dios!* No!

Mil diablos! The whole thing is going down with him. Down—down—it will crush him against the bridge end; it will press his body into the muddy gravel at the river bottom.

Ugh! The end! That bump has finished his fingers. But— He is not falling. A hand has gripped his wrist from above like a vise of steel. The beams have halted their swift drop.

What has happened?

He struggled inwardly with the giddy blackness of fear that had swallowed him up and blinded him. He could not see clearly; he could scarcely feel that he was again being raised. He writhed now with the pain of that hard grip on his wrist.

He was going mad. He fought to loosen the grip, tore into it with the nails of his free hand.

All work on the big structure had stopped now. Most of the men had not looked in time to see the calculated leap by which their big boss had flung himself out and downward when the beams lowered past the end of the bridge at a speed hardly less than that at which they would have fallen. The drop had been calculated, too, to relieve some of the gravity pressure on the hanging native's fingers. The leap had been planned so that the big man gripped the other's wrist over the top of the hanging beams.

But now they saw—saw and wondered how it had been done; wondered whether the big man could maintain his hold, could endure the terrific strain being put upon his forearm, which was bearing almost the whole weight of them both across the corner of one beam. More of them than one looked down—thought of the ten-second fall to the bottom. They looked up again; saw how the iron bit into the arm's flesh.

They held their breath.

Whiter than they had ever seen him before, their superintendent was waving signals now to the engineer on the bank. The cables moved, the beams came slowly upward, went faster back to the end of the plank walk between the rails. They breathed again.

Then they clambered and ran toward the spot where the dangling feet of the two were reaching for the planks. Some tripped lightly over the eight-inch tops of girders; some shinnied up columns by pressing their knees outward against the flanges while they hugged the whole with their arms.

But a glance at their bodies and faces as they gathered on vantage perches like a flock of snow-birds gave no further hint of the bird's balance and poise they so nearly emulated. On every short, thick native body and every dusky face showed the big, bold, heavy muscles and lines of those who toil with vast weights and wrestle with mighty forces. The white foremen and the superintendent were of

the same breed—the breed of brawn—taller, broader, brawnier than their racially darker brethren.

The big boss—the construction engineer of the whole job—stood now on the planks. He was taller than the superintendent, who stood over six feet in his socks. But he was also broader, the brawnier of the brawny crew.

The torn fingers, from which he now calmly sucked the blood and spat it out, could write an order that would move American gold money in seven figures; the fingers of the other hand that hung idly beside him were crooked inward like those of all about them, shaped to the grip on the forge-wrench. The lips could speak Spanish better than they knew it, and half a dozen other languages; but two deep lines reached their ends from the sides of his nostrils, drawn there in savage baring of teeth in fierce bouts with unwieldy things of steel.

A look from the iron-gray eyes would have commanded a mob of them; between the eyes ran upward a double furrow, remnant of the scowl of him who wrestles with giant forces for his job and his life.

Duncan Grout was one of them—only bigger. He was bigger in height and breadth of body, bigger in brain; most of all, bigger in will.

The native whose life he had saved at most imminent peril to his own recovered breath and strength to struggle toward a kneeling posture, to reach for his savior's hand to kiss it after the fashion of his race. He got no hand.

"Give him his pay," curtly ordered the big man's voice, "and send him back with the material-train."

Antonio caught the meaning of the tone. He crawled closer. He was getting back to life. He wanted to keep this highly paid job.

"But, *señor*—" He broke off.

The superintendent was putting in a plea for him.

"It will leave Tom another man short," he said.

"I do not make the fool of myself again," pleaded Antonio Goro.

"Fool, nothing!" snapped the big boss,

"You were scared. I saw it in your face. Once scared, always afraid, on this job. Get off it. You might inform your men," he added in English to his superintendent, with a significant glance at the crowd which had gathered, "that the show is over."

The big boss was mounting the two girders. He signaled the engineer. He rode up and away to the inspection of the work on the other side of the cañon.

He did not glance back at Antonio Goro.

CHAPTER II.

THE OTHER DREAM.

AS the traveler bore him and the beams on which he stood to the open gap between the reaching brackets, Duncan Grout straightened and drew a deep breath. It mattered little to him that the air, even at his height, was hot and sultry. It would have mattered no more had he breasted a northwest gale in Siberia. He had done that exactly two years ago, and February there had been winter. Last year he had been rebuilding quick, makeshift bridges in France. Next year— He sighed. His rugged features became more sober. Then he straightened again.

His eye swept up the cañon, here almost due north and south. His gaze climbed rugged peaks, bald of timber, sparkling white with snow the equator sun could never melt. Through a cleft between two of them rose the crowning height of Cotopaxi, black and grim between their whiteness, spouting ash and smoke from the blasting fires of hell.

Calmly, indifferently, fearlessly he looked at the black deep below him. It gave him only the exhilarating sense of his own height above it.

And here the mighty medley of sounds became a softened harmony to his ears. It was music—music with a symbolism, a meaning. It was the rhythmless, melodyless, but grandly harmonious marching chant of industry's triumphant progress, of man's conquest and dominance of his world.

This was his realm. Here he was king.

Hissing forges, rattling riveters, clanking winches, roaring engines, ponderous beams of steel, men strong enough to fit them where they would—all moved by his will. This monster music was of his playing; that giant fabric was of his making. "This," he murmured to himself, "is good enough for me."

Yet he said it as if some one or something had disputed it.

And something had. That thing was in an unopened envelope of nice stationery upon his battered desk in the corrugated iron shack, the two rooms of which were his present dwelling and office.

It is hard to give the idea of the way Grout felt about that letter. But yet—if you can imagine the case of some of our bibulous citizens a few short months from now, with constitutional prohibition become a black, adamantine fact, with their minds made up to it that the world for them has gone dry as a desert, and is going to stay that way, with their wills set to grin and bear it since they must—

If you can imagine one such citizen with a rich friend whose cellar is stocked for a lifetime, a friend just generous enough to slip the parched citizen, at Christmas, New Year's, and the citizen's birthday, a harmless-looking three-ounce bottle containing the ingredients of the citizen's once favorite cocktail—

If you can now imagine the feelings of this fortunate citizen toward that three-ounce bottle, you are prepared, perhaps, to comprehend the wholly extraordinary and superfluous actions with which Duncan Grout, big-framed, hard-handed, steel-muscled, steel-brained master builder in giant steel, went about the perusal of a gray-tinted letter from a soft-fingered, unmuscled, temperamental, sentimental artist who had never succeeded in art beyond the drawing of pretty-girl faces for the covers of second-rate magazines, but who had a wife and a baby in a nest of a Bronx flat which was so small a visitor could not be shut off in a drawing-room, but had to come right into the home itself.

Or—did you gather the impression that the letter was from a woman? Women wrote to Duncan Grout on typewriters and

then took the letters to their bosses for signing.

Imagine your thirsty citizen again. He walks six blocks for a bottle of olives or cherries, as the case may be. He takes his stand before his sideboard. He pours the liquor from the harmless bottle to a cut-glass decanter, carefully dusted off and washed. He searches the back parts of a closet for the flat-bowl little goblet. He even sets a hassock at the approximate level of the iron or brass foot-rail. Slowly he tilts the bottle over the glass, slowly pours. Very deliberately he spears the olive or the cherry. Delicately he sinks or floats it in the pale-yellow fluid. Is not anything as worth doing as this worth doing right?

To be sure, the genial friends are absent—the smiling barkeep with his busy towel, the ringing register, the clicking ticker, the vast array of near-cut glass, the loud-voice story-teller and louder-voice songster down the line with a slight overload apiece, the belligerent argument between the two heavier-load contestants at the far end of the bar. To be sure, the meager drinks will prove but an aggravation.

But—it is worth while, at that.

After the day's work was ended and the morrow's work planned, after the coarse dinner with the superintendent and foremen was sufficiently digested to have its coarseness forgotten, Duncan Grout removed his soiled khaki and assumed a soft smoking-jacket. He flung aside the black cigar of his liking and got a box of tasteless cigarettes from the bottom drawer of the battered desk.

He set up a folding easy chair. To one side of it he drew a fine phonograph, the only real bit of furniture in the shack. From its cabinet he selected three records. Mrs. Chixon was a semiprofessional singer. Two of the songs on the records she sang frequently for her husband and his guests. The third, Grout had once heard another woman sing. It was "The Rosary."

To the other side of the chair he set a pine table. On this he placed his desk-light, after unscrewing its bulb and replacing that with one of pale-yellow opalescence. Under it he placed the box of

cigarettes, a match-stand, a package of soft phonograph needles, and two photographs. Both of these were amateurs' snap-shots. One was a flash-light view of the Chixon family in the Chixon library den; the other showed the face of the girl who had sung "The Rosary."

Sitting back in the easy chair, with the soft light on the page, held up to shut out the rough interior of the shack, with the phonograph softly discoursing the two songs, with an occasional glance at the flash-light picture—one might approach an imagination of the scene in which that precious letter had been written.

After it was finished, after it had given up its last attainable drop of the charmed atmosphere of Chixon's home, Duncan Grout would drink another draft of synthesized happiness. He would set the picture of the girl up under the light and play "The Rosary." Perhaps by then his imagination would be keyed to picture his own home. But it would be harder. His own home did not exist, had never existed, never would exist.

Time had been when the picture had seemed more than a hollow dream, when it had existed as a living hope, when he had built it into bridges, when he had tried to build it into life. But that time was become a series of poignant memories to which he might well prefer the purely imaginary vision.

No—Norma Ballard had not trifled with him, had not been false to him, had not deceived him in the least. He had but deceived himself. He had been a fool to propose to her as he had done, when he had done it—or ever in any way. It had been in his twenty-fifth year that he had met her. She lived in Montclair. Her father conducted a branch office of a stock brokerage concern. He had been building his first bridge "on his own." It was to gain the money for his last hard-earned year in the school of engineering.

The bridge had been wretchedly designed by some politician-architect. When it came to building it, Grouch found that he must encroach upon land the property of Ellwood Ballard. That had taken him to Ballard's house.

He had seen Norma—and been taken to the Ballard home several more times. Once he had had to wait for Mr. Ballard. Miss Ballard had entertained him—had sung for him "The Rosary." Mrs. Ballard had suggested it.

A second time he had had to wait. Mrs. Ballard had not been there that time. And he had proposed. Anyhow, he guessed he had. He had stood up before her and heard his voice uttering a torrent of passionate words that rushed unbidden from lips unable to stop them, hardly able to keep up with their pronunciation.

God knew what he had said and how he had said it. Even now, in moments of extreme excitement, his lips would lapse to the rough, violent vocabulary of the big, hard men from whose ranks he had risen. He had stopped when she had shrunk back to the farthest corner of the divan on which she sat, her hands before her face as if to fend off blows rather than words.

Then he had hastened to put himself in a different light. He had apologized. He had explained that he really was getting on toward better things and away from such things as had cropped out in his speech. He had told her his plans, his successes thus far in realizing those plans.

And she, still white to the lips after his first verbal onslaught, had burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Please—please," she had gurgled, "don't ask me to finance you, too!" Then she had rushed from the room, up the stairs, rocking and choking with laughter until she had slammed an upper door.

Two hours later he had got to the significance of her mocking words. What he had meant to extenuate the crudeness of his proposal had amounted to a demonstration better adapted to prove his financial solvency than his fitness to talk love to such a girl. He might have said the same things to induce a bank president to take his note.

But it had not been for seven years—not until last December—that a jolt had come to awaken him to understand that the fundamental thing which made any proposal from him a grotesque jest to a girl like her—was not a thing he could overcome. The

jolt had come just in time to save him from a second attempt at wooing.

In those years he had overcome much. On seven continents his name was known to men who build bridges or had them built. He was a member of renowned societies of engineers. In addition to his hard-won American degree in engineering, and to its highest military orders, France had bestowed two honorary university degrees. He need no longer go out to work in distant wilds. America offered him opportunities to tempt a millionaire. He was one soldier back from the war with a world at his feet and its hands full of something better than loud clapping.

He was in the office of a minor official of a vast corporation that dangled a flattering offer before his eyes. The official had been detailed to make the offer clearer and more tempting. Once already he had dined Grout at his home. He invited again; Grout had accepted. Mr. Oliver got his home on the telephone, his wife at its other end.

"You'll be dining at home this evening?" he had asked.

Mrs. Oliver's voice was one of those peculiarly carrying sorts that can be heard all around a telephone receiver.

Grout caught the rather rasping "Why?" distinctly.

"I'm asking Mr. Grout again," replied the husband.

And again Grout heard: "Oh, Heaven! Have I got to stand for that trained iron gorilla again?"

And so he had known the real why of Norma Ballard's laughter! He had not realized before, he could not quite grasp now, wherein his manners differed from theirs. But they—men and women of Mrs. Oliver's and Norma Ballard's sort—they knew. He was trained—so well trained he could pick the right forks for six courses. He was still a gorilla—an uncouth laborer of whom no training could make a gentleman.

So he had dropped the dazzling chances in America, and had come again to the wilds. So he had left Montclair unvisited. So his own home had quit being a hope and become but a pleasurable dream from which, after a moment or two, he would

rouse himself and go to bed and the dreamless sleep that would fit him for tomorrow's hard realities.

So he planned as he carefully slit open the envelope with his knife, while the phonograph softly began Glück's "Jocelyn Berceuse." He grinned happily over the first page of the scrawled letter. Harry Chixon was guying at something he'd reach on the next page.

Then plans, dreams, the chair on which he had reclined, and the record on the phonograph all seemed to smash at once. He was standing beside the table, his huge frame humped over to see the page under the lamp. The big, hard lines of brow and mouth were deeper than ever. The hands that held the tinted sheets might have been gripping the sides of a ten-ton beam in an effort to save it from falling as it slipped in the chains.

He did not read them. He dashed through the lines until he found the two words he sought. Then he flung them all to the floor, kicked the broken chair from his path, snatched the telephone from his desk.

"Get the Guayaquil cable-office—quick!" he snapped into the instrument the instant it clicked in his ear. As he waited, his scowling face seeming to threaten time itself for keeping him its short minutes—

God! God! Her!" he muttered thickly, fiercely.

Then the hard features softened into a smile that might have blessed a mother's face as she soothed the cries of a toddling babe still frightened at having been lost.

CHAPTER III.

STEADY!

HERE is the trifling, jesting, jollying letter of the man who painted pretty faces to the man who builded giant bridges—the letter that was already attaining the results universal to the attempts of witty men to get funny with strong ones:

YOU BIG, UNMITIGATED BLUFF:

You are caught at last with the goods! You are called for a show-down; you are shown up in your naked falseness! Your

mask and armor of steel are riven! The beans are spilled. The cat is out. We see, know what you are!

Only a week ago I was laughing over that sentimental ending you always wind a letter up with, about our den and music and gas-logs. And my faith in you, my belief that you were what you seemed, led me to insinuate to the wife of my bosom that your real idea of a homy, musical evening would be to sit on the end of a bridge-girder by arc-light, a fifteen-minute tumble above some swollen torrent, and hear the steam-riveters' soprano drown out the bass roar of the engines.

But you hadn't fooled her so entirely. She suspected you even then of being softer than you try to look and act. Thank Heaven! I didn't bet anything on you.

For now, oh, where would I be if I had backed that rock-hewn face of yours for the price of tickets to the opera? Why, I'd be listening to the opera.

This morning Stella found out it is our maid's—I mean working housekeeper's—birthday. And a wonder of a housekeeper she is. Only she was impossible to explain in the rôle. She wasn't a servant; didn't know how to be a servant; and she wasn't one of those down-and-out foreign ladies who do that sort of thing over here. But she did all the things we had hired other servants to do about a hundred times better than any other ever tried to do them for us; and didn't do any of the things most of them tried to do to us.

So we were tickled to death to discover her birthday in time. I had never been able to get up the nerve to offer her a tip. Here was our chance to show appreciation!

You may not believe it, but I had a whole ten-dollar bill. We decided to present it to our paragon, and the day off in which to spend it. The lady had gone out for the morning marketing. It was Stella's idea to pin a wish for many returns to the bill and place it on her bureau, where she would find it when she went to dress for the day. Stella slipped into her room—the first time she had ever been in it since this lady took possession of it.

The next I heard was a scream from my spouse. I rushed to render first aid. There stood Stella, paralyzed with astonishment, inarticulate, speechless with amaze.

I looked where she was looking—right in the place of honor under the center of the mirror on her bureau. And I caught the paralysis.

For—I was looking at you. *Yes, you!*

A nice little snapshot it was, taken about six or seven years ago, I should judge. And you were looking just about as rock-hewn, cold-rolled, case-hardened, steel-ly indifferent as a wop tenor in love with the soprano,

and doing the "Romeo" balcony act! Ye gods! I haven't been right since.

Well, we hadn't recovered enough from the shock to move when the household queen-regent returned and caught us. I managed to make the ten-spot apologize for our presence and got out. Not so Stella. A 75 mm. shell couldn't have blown her out without the story.

Her father, it seems, has lost his money and his nerve. The wages we pay go to keep him in a sanatorium. She earns that because nobody has sense enough to teach her other ways to earn money, and because she'd just finished a series of magazine articles by some idiot who wrote of the present remunerativeness, dignity, independence, and general desirability of housework!

You'll have to blame Stella for my writing this so promptly. She's sure you're in immediate need of it as relief from chronic cardiac lesion; and I don't dare tell her a man could feel the way you look in that picture and ever get over it. And, since Stella expects me to read her your letters, I won't take the chance that you'll be asking: "Which one?" Her name is Norma Ballard.

Before that picture of your face shattered my certitudes of everything I had supposed I knew, I thought that mine was—

HARRY CHIXON.

There was nothing funny about the letter to Duncan Grout. The thought that Norma Ballard was in circumstances that compelled her to do common housework for a livelihood was a more poignant grief than any conceivable loss of his own could have been. The fact that she cared for him—he made nothing else of the presence of his picture on her bureau—was joy as poignant as the grief.

His brain was become that of a scientist. His feelings were still elemental. Joy and grief shook him, rocked him. But they fused into action that soothed him to utter tenderness. He became even patient over the usual delays in getting connections with the Guayaquil cable-station on the point.

To-morrow her troubles would be over. She would know that he still reciprocated her love; that she need never wash another dish if she did not want to do so.

Right through the tedious spelling out of words and names beyond the limited English of the operator, his voice would hardly have been recognized by his superintendents who knew him best and really loved him. As the cable operator heard

it, his message might have been a mother's call to a hurt child to end its grief in her arms. The terseness of its phrasing was unconscious, the result of much habit of making cable and telegraph messages:

NORMA, care Chixon,
919 East 189, New York.

Come marry me immediately. Apply Foster and Company, 500 Broad Street, all expenses. Cable answer, per same.

DUNCAN GROUT.

To this he added another cablegram to the banking and brokerage concern. It bade them extend Norma Ballard his full credit and assist her as needed. Signed by a special code signature, that message was worth about thirty thousand dollars to Harry Chixon's family housekeeper.

He was through. He turned from the desk and the telephone. He stared about the room. Somehow it had gone strange. Strange? Good God! What hadn't gone strange? His whole world was changed. He was changed.

He had learned that Norma Ballard loved him! All the things he had thought he must give up—they were coming to him. Chixon's flat! He laughed aloud. The attempt to get the dainty atmosphere of that flat seemed amazingly ludicrous. He would have his own home!

The tremendous thing grew upon him. He wanted to rush out of doors to find room for his new-born happiness. He didn't do it because he felt that outdoors was not big enough.

He had been bred where men got drunk when their feelings got big. He wanted to call in McGrath and Hogan, his superintendents; Drake, his assistant engineer; his bookkeepers, his two men stenographers; his foremen—yes, and all the natives—and drink up everything potable in the medicine-chest and the storehouse. But a man couldn't get drunk enough for this. No company could approach the adequate hilarity.

His pistols—he would fire them round after round into the cañon. Fudge! All the dynamite cached down the line, set off to blow the bridge and the cañon's walls into the river, could not come near getting up the noise for this. He'd have to find

the fuses to set Cotopaxi and Chimborazo and Antisana all blowing their tops off at once!

He sat down rather weakly. For a while he sat still, dazed with the immensity of his sudden happiness. At length he picked up Chixon's letter again. He read it over—not because anything Chixon could ever write again could add to his mirth, but because he must do something. Not even the passages that spoke of Norma seemed interesting. He had taken from them the one great fact. But—

He paused suddenly. What about her father? He had not really noticed that at all in his hurried hunt to make sure that it was of Norma that Chixon wrote. And would she feel that she could provide for her father from his funds? Just what had he cabled?

Another thought seized him as he tried to recall. He got out paper and pencil. He wrote the words he had dictated to the Guayaquil operator.

Once more he leaped to his phone, and this time never grew patient with the long wait for connections.

"This is Grout," he cried. "Did you send those cables of mine yet?"

"*Sí, señor*—yes, sir," came the response.

"Oh!" It sounded like something dropping. His eyes fell to the memory copy he had made of the message he had sent. Change the address, and leave out "marry me," the message was exactly the same as the New Orleans telegram by which he had ordered Drake to leave the New York office and join him.

Before him rose the picture of Norma Ballard sitting, shrinking to the farthest corner of the divan in her father's library, her hands before her face, white with fright at his sudden and impetuously fierce declaration of his love. Since that was the last time he had seen her, she must have loved him then as much as now. Then he had thrust her from him by his manner. Then he had made her afraid.

And now he had sent her an order to get expense money and come to her wedding immediately! It seemed as if he could hear his telephone receiver rasping: "Gorilla!"

But his new hope could not stay long crushed. It survived futile efforts to think up another cablegram which could undo the faults of the first without also weakening its purpose.

Gorilla! Well, even that cablegram hadn't been worse than his first attempt to propose to her. She had kept his picture for seven years since that. She would never wait another seven years without seeing more of him than his picture!

He knew now that she cared. If that cablegram didn't produce the desired effect, he'd get it in the end. He had got about everything else he tried for. In the last analysis it looked as if the real reason why he had not got the one thing he wanted more than all the rest was because he had been about twice as badly scared as he had ever scared her.

Fears were not the sort of thing to hold him back long—now that he knew they were fears.

CHAPTER IV.

VICTORY'S PRICE.

IT might safely be asserted that no more unpropitious moment in history could have been chosen for their purpose than that at which two native structural iron-workers presented themselves at the outer door of Grout's office shack. It was three o'clock of the afternoon following the sending of his night cablegram to Norma Ballard. To young Vincent Fahey, in the tiny vestibule in the corner, they announced themselves as respectively the secretary and general delegate of the Union General de Alarifes de Hierro de Ecuador.

For men of such office, three o'clock was a rather considerate choice. Duncan Grout arranged his working day with a view to the climate and the habits of his men, beginning at earliest dawn and ending at twilight, but leaving the hot four hours of midday free for lunch and siesta. In coming at three, the men were not sacrificing working hours.

Moreover, rough as they were, their manner might have been a lesson in politeness to Vincent Fahey, though he himself was a

fair disciple of Chesterfield. They doffed their sombreros to address him. They hoped they were not mistaken in their understanding that the Señor Ingeniero Superintendente General never took siestas, and, therefore, would not be disturbed by their visit.

"He'll see you," young Fahey assured them, with almost disconcerting promptness and a smile which was puzzling. His eyes seemed fascinated with the bits of red ribbons they had protruding from the breast pockets of their jumpers. His smile was too much like a grin. "Wait here a minute," he bade them.

He was really an ambitious young man, or he would have stayed at home instead of coming out here. He had been having the kind of day to worry ambition. The big boss had not spoken an unkind word to him. Rather, he had been the soul of patience, had taken the blame for everything upon himself. But when things were all right, the boss was not particularly patient. Things were all wrong.

It seemed as if the big boss had not satisfied or been satisfied with any of the men who had been to see him thus far to-day. He failed to grasp what they wanted; failed to tell them what they wanted to know. It was worst of all when they called in from the various parts of the bridge on the telephone.

It was Vincent Fahey's firm conviction that nobody else in the world could say so much in so few words as the big boss on a telephone. From the crisp, "Grout speaking," or "*Grout aquí*," to the clipped "by" at the end, any man could have got a whole course in the art of conversational short distances. But not to-day.

To-day he reached for the telephone as if he were afraid of it, and seemed a little faint when he learned the identity of the calling party, and messed up the conversation like Vincent's grandmother from the old country who had never talked into one of the devilish things before.

Frankly, Fahey was puzzled. Of any other man he would decide that some tremendous deal was on. Of his big boss, he believed that the loss of all the money in the world might tilt the end of his cigar

higher, but would furnish no other outward sign.

All day it had seemed inevitable that the big man must blow up sooner or later. Something in the appearance of the two representatives of the Union General de Alarifes de Hierro de Ecuador—especially the red bits of ribbon—gave Fahey the feeling that he would not be the victim of the explosion. For all his business-college Spanish and his earnest endeavor to succeed on a South American job, he had not learned to love his present neighbors quite as himself.

He reached the other room in time to see Grout hang up the receiver after another call. The big man positively slumped down into his chair. It was with a painful effort that he looked up at his young secretary-office-boy.

"Señor Juan Flores and Señor Dolores Alcantara, the secretary and the general delegate of the structural iron-workers of Ecuador, want to see you." The big boss was positively ill. Under no other circumstances could Fahey have got all that said. Apparently only the last words had registered on Grout's brain at all.

But they had gone in. "Huh? What's that?" the big boss demanded, suddenly coming upright. And this time he did not wait for the whole description. "Bring them in," Grout snapped.

Fahey's manner was quite equal to theirs in Latin politeness as he bowed the gentlemen in. Then he hurried back to his own telephone and considerably whispered to the switchboard operator in the main shack to pass the word around to watch for fire-works. Grout's first words were hopeful:

"Put your hats back on; you might forget them when you go out. Who is it you say you are?"

He let them get about half through telling him. Then:

"Well, who sent you here to tell me about it?"

"The union, *señor*." There was no discounting the trepidation of the general delegate's tone.

"And who's he?" bellowed Grout.

"Señor does not understand," faltered one of the pair.

"*Señor* does understand perfectly. *Señor* is well acquainted with unions. Here are three traveling cards of unions right here in *señor's* pocket. Those are real unions.

"*Señor* understands! There is no union here. There isn't going to be any union here unless I form it and am at the head of it. You fellows have your union right there—those red rags. No; keep them on. Make them show a little better. That's it.

"Now—you swine—out of here! Out of here quick! Come on!"

He had leaped up as if from hidden springs, caught the two of them by a shoulder apiece, swung them around, and shifted his grip to their jumper collars before they had breath to speak. He shook them as a playful terrier shakes a handkerchief.

"Pick up that rag!" he roared, bearing the one to a stooping position by a jerk of his hand. "Put it on again. Now we'll show the last damned scoundrel in the works what happens to any Bolshevik stuff or anybody who tries to blackmail me with union stuff around these works."

Still gripping their collars, he propelled them forward by short jerks that must have dislocated any but sturdy necks. He shoved them to the door, through it, on through the little vestibule and the outside door, down the steps.

"Thought you could stick me for money with threats of strikes and explosions and that sort of thing, didn't you? I'll help your thinking for a while," he snarled as he went past Fahey, who showed signs of terror at more fireworks than he had counted on. "I know your dirty breed. And I know what to do with it. *Sigue—sige—sige!*"

Down the sloping path from the storage and office buildings to the tracks at the bridge-head he rushed the two hapless men. The buttons of one's jumper broke. The loosened collar gave play to the fearful jerks, and the iron fist hit a blow with each one of them. The man's legs gave way. Grout seemed not to notice it.

All the men in sight—lounging through the last moments of the midday hours of rest—got to their feet and stared.

"See that ribbon!" Grout yelled at a

group of them, and lifted the alleged secretary of a general union clear of the ground and held him at arm's length for inspection. "Watch where it goes!" A few more steps brought him alongside a box-car. There were two quick swings of his arms. The two men cleared the sides of the car, and landed on its bottom with heavy thuds.

"Take them back to Machala if they behave. If they don't, throw them into the cañon!" he shouted at the conductor of the supply-train, who came running from a hundred yards away. "If they need the hospital, tell the sister in charge to send me the bill."

He stalked back to his shack. Men looked into his clouded face, and hurried off with sudden remembrance that the whistle was about to blow for work. The lines of his mouth were deep, the lips drew back to one side and bared two teeth, his forehead showed knots under the skin, his steel-gray eyes seemed black.

Back in his desk-chair, he held out one of his hands. It was shaking like a broken twig in a wind.

"You damned—damned fool!" he croaked to himself. He had never done anything so nearly insane before in his life. He had never known any excitement to reduce him to this state before in his life. Never but once. Just such a shaken wreck as he now was, he had sunk back on the divan from which he had driven Norma Ballard, in hysterics, up-stairs to her room. It was the revenge of civilized nerves for yielding them to savage moods.

"But—won't she ever answer?" he groaned the anxiety which had taken the night and the day to rub raw a nervous system which was really much nearer breaking strain than he ever suspected, since will had trained him to a calm in ordinary situations which left his nerves unruffled.

Then he pulled himself together, aroused by the lapse from control to realization that he was hardly living up to his standards. He had played the fool in handling those men. The folly had not been unjustly cruel to them. They were simply blackmailers, with no shadow of organization behind them, or with just enough for

them to wield as a club whereby to get themselves bought off from making any trouble.

No reasonable union could have found a ground of complaint with Grout. His workmen had often found him ready to take their side against a company for which he and they were working, but only when there was just cause for dissatisfaction. Twice in his life he had struck with his men.

But the precious pair he had uncere- moniously dumped into a box-car were not the principals of the scheme. He became surer of that, as he thought them over. Cleverer, nervier men than they had set them on to see what would happen to them. And by being a little slower he might have learned who the principals were.

Too late for that now. But it was not too late to get down to the work under his hand. Too long he had sat there, unable to do anything but answer the telephone in a panic of fear lest it be the cable-office relaying Norma's message to him—and the wrong message.

He got up and put on his hat. He strode down the path to the bridge and out upon it. He cleared up orders he had failed to make clear to McGrath.

"Wanted on the telephone, sir"—from the head foreman of a raising gang, stepping from one of the numerous booths about the structure—failed to overcome the stiffening of his nerve.

"Who is it?" he asked with at least perfect outward calm.

"Hogan, I think, sir," said the foreman.

"Tell him I'm coming right over," Grout replied. He turned and looked to where the conveyer traveler was just lifting a heavy girder. He hurried back and boarded it.

But even here, as he was borne along over the top of the colossal thing of his building, there was a sense of strain rather than any of the slight thrill of exultation he usually experienced on the highest points of the bridges he built. His mind would revert to the possibility of the cable mes- sage coming while he was on the other side, being delayed an extra moment in getting to him.

He had reached almost exactly the point beyond the farthest beams of the bracket where, yesterday, Antonio Goro had so nearly started a hurtling plunge to the depths below, when a shout arose on shore, and the traveler was suddenly halted.

"*Cablegrama! Cablegrama!*" he caught the words of the shout. It was borne along to the end of the bridge. Less than thirty feet from him, in a wooden box tied to the barely finished truss, a telephone bell rang. The switchboard operator was putting the connection to the nearest instrument. Mc- Grath opened the box, then waved to him.

It was not more than six feet down; it was a bit less than six feet behind the point at which he stood on the hanging girder to the end of the top chord of the truss as thus far completed. That chord was a lattice box-girder twenty inches wide. Grout crouched for the leap. It was less than he had done a thousand times.

A moment he stood thus, in the half- crouching position. Then his face grew whitish under the bronze tan. An expres- sion of amazement spread over it. At the same instant the engineer started the traveler backward. Grout lowered himself to hang by the hands, dropped off at a cross-brace of the truss.

But there he paused a moment, look- ing out at the end of the top chord— on beyond it. Why hadn't he jumped? What had stopped him? He had been *scared!*

Somehow, the thought of it slowed his intended rush for the telephone-box, to which he now climbed down one of the diagonals. He could not sense any fear in the climbing, nor yet in walking the ten or twelve feet over a ten-inch girder to the box. It was all at giddy height, where a misstep would be one of a thousand feet down. But he had never been afraid of anything before.

But he got it again, enough of it to make him hesitate a second, as he turned from the box after hanging up the receiver. There was a two-foot open space between the plank-walk in the middle and the side girders, on one of which he had stood to telephone. A thrill of indefinable dread of that two feet of space, a throb of relief at

having got over it—it was the same thing again.

Norma Ballard had cabled his answer:

Impossible to come. Matting explanation.
NORMA.

CHAPTER V.

A PRESENTIMENT.

BUT as he again started across the river, Duncan Grout's jaws were clamped hard. The time it had taken him to get back aboard the girder in the conveyer's chains had been sufficient for him to realize that this was far from being the worst answer in the world. Norma had not refused to marry him. She had merely said it was impossible for her to come here to do so.

Making impossibles so possible that they came to pass was in his line. His own career was an impossible thing.

When he got back to his office he telephoned another cablegram.

Are we engaged?

He felt that the answer could not be of ultimate significance. If they were not engaged now, they would be. It merely saved time to know the exact point from which he must start.

That powerful single-action brain and will of his had acted for seven years upon the assumption that what he lacked for marrying the one woman he had ever wanted to marry was the position which could be translated into terms of social equality. He had been ambitious before he met her. Afterward his ambition had carried him beyond his previous dreams, into positions her father might have viewed with envy.

For several months he had labored under the impression that no position of his could win her. That "gorilla" thing, from a woman of the general station in which he had known Norma, had sunk deep. He was the victim of the supersensitiveness of the social inferior. His efforts at self-culture had prepared him to appreciate that a good many men attain wealth and even education without thereby acquiring the tastes

and graces which could make them agreeable companions for those born and reared in the atmosphere of wealth and education.

All the jests about the newly rich began to point now to his own awakened sense of inferiority. Every time he shaved, he discerned more clearly that his features were those of a rough, hard toiler.

Had he wished but to possess her under the sanction of matrimony, he might have set out along those lines which were not altogether foreign to his nature to increase his money-power, and use it to create a situation where he could force himself upon her as the alternative of financial disaster to her father. But that had been so foreign to his feeling for her that he had never thought of it, never looked up the possibilities of it. He had loved her too well to possess her at cost of her own happiness; loved her well enough to renounce possession.

And then he had read Chixon's frothy letter. He had learned that his face was not too bad to decorate Norma Ballard's dressing-table. He had discovered that her love was not, had never been, a thing beyond him. And he had instantly realized that those six months of certainty that he could never have her had sharpened his desire for her more than the seven years of waiting to get her.

Now nothing should stop him, nothing could stop him.

Tom Hogan, the superintendent of the building on the east bank of the cañon, was the one white man on the job with a wife. Just back from France, he had been married two days to Mrs. Hogan when Grout had offered him the position here. Mrs. Hogan had insisted on making the trip with her husband and their stay here a honeymoon.

They had a portable bungalow of three tiny rooms, a stone's-throw from Grout's shack. Significant of the big man's present attitude, with Norma's "impossible" ringing in his ears, was his first question, as he dismounted from the girder that had brought him across:

"Say, Hogan, have you got a catalogue of those portable bungalows, and are there any of them bigger than yours?"

Norma Ballard's reply to his second cable was no more or less encouraging than her first:

"Await letter," it bade him. It did not prevent him at all from sending her an even dozen cablegrams of near-letter length while he waited, each an attempt to answer and demolish what he had guessed at that day as the ground for her impossibility.

Then he got her letter, and realized that once more he had failed to appreciate quite the delicacy of her position. She could not, it said, marry any man who did not feel able and willing to assume the expense of support of her father. That would be more of an undertaking than might be assumed from the fact that she was supporting him with her meager wages. Her father was favored with special rates at the sanatorium.

But the head of the institution had just informed her that it was no place for him; that his temperament was one more injured than helped by enforced quiet; that the only proper treatment would be an environ of life much as he had formerly led it, save for the business strain.

Since Ellmore Ballard had formerly lived to the tune of about four hundred a month over and above his own or his family's mere housing and feeding expenses; had as visible assets five thousand shares of Bolivian Queen Silver Mining Stock with a minus value of the cost of printing the certificates, and a daughter trained in several ladylike accomplishments of no particular use, it was a wonder of a prescription!

She was sorry he had proposed marriage to her without knowing these facts. She would esteem his proposal as much an honor as ever, even if he were not able to renew it now that he knew just the expense it involved. In any event, however, she hardly saw how she could accept from a future husband the money it would take to establish her father for several weeks. That could not escape entirely the indelicacy involved in a woman's taking money from a man to whom she was not married.

The light of triumph flashed in Grout's eyes as he finished her letter. Within a short while two cablegrams were on their

way to New York. One bade Foster & Co. offer anonymously, through another brokerage, thirty thousand dollars for five thousand shares of Bolivian Queen Silver from Miss Norma Ballard, care of Chixon, 919 East One Hundred and Eighty-Ninth Street, attorney for her father, the owner. Purchasing brokers could admit that their client desired control of the Bolivian mining properties.

The other cablegram was addressed to Norma Ballard. It read:

Letter received. Proposal stands. Cable answer.

But this one was to stop on its way, right at Guayaquil station, long enough to give the first twenty-four hours' headway.

Three days later the answer to her cable followed by forty hours the crisp "Bought" sent him by Foster & Co. to announce the fulfilment of his order. It was relayed across the cañon to an instrument set out at the extreme end of completed work, very much like that at which he had taken her first message. Hogan had answered the bell, as McGrath had done before.

"It's a cablegram for you," he announced, standing the receiver upside down on the bottom of the box and taking the two-foot step back to the middle plankway.

He moved aside from Grout's path. Then he noticed something that puzzled him. The big boss paused before taking the two-foot step over space, set himself with an effort, and leaped as if he were trying for a real jump. He almost knocked the telephone box from its temporary fastening to the column, and had to clutch at the steel to get his balance.

It was all done as clumsily as it could have been by some scared amateur. Hogan watched his employer telephone. He decided to stand closer. He put out his hand when Grout looked back, again with an effort that might have done for six feet as well as two. And Grout caught the hand with a clutch that hurt it.

"Gosh!" the superintendent exclaimed. "You must be getting nervous news."

The big man was quick to take advantage of the excuse. "I did, Hogan," he admitted with a rare grin. "I just got word that the best girl in the world is coming on the next arrival of the *Reina de Barbados* to marry me!"

Hogan indulged some profanely cheering congratulations.

"But say," he finished, "thank Gawd the missus didn't hand me her answer on top of no bridge frame. I reckon she'd 'a' been a widow before we got married if she had."

As Grout started away he turned back again.

"Say, Hogan—if you don't mind, keep that about the girl as strictly confidential. There are—a lot of slips in things, you know."

"Not the missus, even?" Hogan asked, a shade of disappointment on his face. "She'd be tickled to hear it."

"Oh, I hardly think so," Grout objected. "I'd rather nothing was said at all yet."

He went off puzzled. He could not understand that the men who came nearest him loved him, made their women love him by their praise of him, and set them wishing for him that which every woman thinks every man should have—a wife. But he did not puzzle long over this. He had other puzzles on his mind.

Three weeks later Duncan Grout awoke at four in the morning exactly as if the alarm-clock had been set to rouse him. He had planned to sleep late. He needed to do so, could do so. For he had given his men a holiday in which to assist him to celebrate his marriage!

But the waking habit held him. He tried to get what rest there is in lying awake. For once he was not atingle with the fever to be up and doing; for once, too, there were things to think of worth the luxury of lying still to think them.

It was his wedding day! The coasting steamer, *Reina de Barbados* was due in Guayaquil Bay at one o'clock. Every arrangement was completed to the last detail. A train, duly decorated in honor of the occasion, would start him for Machala at ten. At twelve he would board a launch. He would meet the ship the instant it turned

the point and slowed down to thread its way into the bay's channels.

And Norma was on it. She had come to him.

Together—together—they would hurry back to the city. All had been arranged for their wedding at the *convento*—it had been no mean job to arrange it with the requisite dispensations, and to find the good, jolly little *padre* who could and would make an English job of all but the essentially Latin parts of the ceremony. The little *padre's* congregation would lack nothing for fireworks and decorations on the next *fiesta*.

And Norma would be his. Together—united—man and wife—he and Norma would come back up here on the train. Together, with his bride tucked under his arm for protection, they would run the gauntlet of confetti, a band, and fireworks, to their bungalow.

Their bungalow! His *home* at last!

Funny that the brightness of the dream-picture went dim at this, the climax of his life-dreaming. Three weeks ago he had started to erect a tiny cottage. Each day had enlarged his ideas of it, seen him send for more workmen. He had thought he might sell the house to the railroad when he was through with it to make a shack for the bridge watchmen.

Now he knew the native officials of the road would vie for its possession as a rural *hacienda*. It was a country place for a governor. Little wonder that he needed sleep, after supervising its erection in addition to his regular man-sized job on the bridge.

But—would she like it? Would its necessary tropical accommodations depress her with their strangeness?

Would she sit opposite him at the wonderful mahogany table—over the dinner prepared by the Chinese woman he had bribed from the house of a state secretary—and feel anything to reciprocate what he thought he would feel, that just to be there with her was an incomparable feast? Her face, her eyes, her hair for him; but what was she going to see in him that would not inspire terror at the very thought of finding herself in his power?

Then came the strange caper of his imagination. He laughed at these difficulties. They would never arise. His bride would not endure qualms of fear over their first tête-à-tête meal—because the meal would not take place.

A presentiment! All his hard-headed, highly trained, experienced thinking failed to down it. He despised presentiments, as a sane man should. He could not overcome this one.

The truth was that Grout had paid, and paid high, for whatever might come of his dream of happiness. The money he had given Norma and spent on the bungalow cut deep into the resources of a man who had been practically unsalaried for two years of war work. Still more had he paid in worry and work, cutting far into his sleep.

That touch of nervousness about stepping over openings in high places was a symptom of the price he had paid. It might in an instant turn to the giant fear that would put an end to his doing business on his present method of close personal contact.

Another index of the price he had paid was in a slacking off of the morale of his men. Partly it was due to some cutting down of personal supervision to which he had accustomed them. Partly it was because the personal supervision lacked some of that magnetic, magnificently dynamic force which made him the success he was in handling men of undeveloped minds.

That outbreak of temper which had given to two blackmailers under thin disguise of labor unionism their due, but had been too furious to stop and wring from them the identity of the real arch-plotter of their scheme, was due to cost him dearly. It had warned a really clever crook to more caution.

Three serious blunders had occurred on the other side of the cañon since then. They might be only blunders. Hogan was an unusually capable superintendent with an enviable record. He did not let blunders pass without investigation. He could not place responsibility for these blunders. But he could detect the subtle symptoms of growing insubordination that showed in the

men's indifference to the blunders and a growing carelessness.

Hogan was handicapped by his lack of Spanish. He had to investigate through an interpreter. He used Manuel Perro, who generally translated his orders for him when they got beyond the point where he and the other foremen could understand each other. Manuel Perro was, possibly owing to the loss of one eye, a villainous-looking, half-breed Mexican. But he was the best and most generously efficient native foreman on the whole job, and his fluent English made him indispensable.

The suspicious fact about the mistakes lay in that, after each of them, a mysterious telephone call had come to Grout by night, apparently from Machala. The calling party identified himself only as the treasurer of the Union General de Alarifes de Hierro de Ecuador. Each time he inquired whether the Señor Ingeniero Superintendente General preferred another blunder to treating with the representatives of the union. If there was a way to bring him out into the open, Grout had it yet to discover with more careful thought and effort than he had been able to give it.

There had been grounds for presentiment. The possibility of his own sudden succumbing to irresistible, ruinous fear still threatened. The danger still impended that the present restlessness and mild insubordination of the men might leap up into flame, and burst forth in a strike marked by rioting and general disaster to the whole bridge project.

But this morning began a holiday in which they could not strike nor he go to places perilous to his balance. The Reina de Barbados had been spoken in a calm sea six hours ago, and nothing indicated any prospective break in her schedule. There was not a reason in the world for the presentiment that harrowed him now, the feeling, amounting to conviction, that his marriage was not going through; that to-night would find him only a badly burned wreck in the ashes of his dreams.

- And then the thing happened. Science has found means to gather some intimation of impending bad weather. Man has learned

to take warning from skies and clouds and winds. The furious demonstrations of these forces of nature find only the foolish wholly unawares. Even the eruptions of volcanoes begin with certain slow increase of fiery activity. But we have yet to discover if this earth of ours gives forth the slightest tick of advance information about an earthquake.

It was not much of an earthquake. Most of the people down in Machala and Guayaquil learned of it from early risers who had been awake to feel the moment of swaying tremor. It woke few of Grout's workmen. It was not because it shook him from his balance that he, standing before his cracked mirror for what should be his last shave in the crude shack, dropped his razor to the floor and gripped the table for support. It was because he felt it as the final proof of his fears.

"There it goes," he muttered, as if the rustle and shake were just what he had been waiting to hear.

Then he dashed to the eastward window of the iron room. The designer of the bridge had figured on worse earthquakes than this. Grout knew that it should stand, without a hairbreadth shift from its accurately gaged lines, through a shake-up of four times the violence of tremor he had just felt.

He was in time to see, across the cañon, a great section of one of those fan-rib braces bulge outward, tear from their rivets a dozen counterbraces, snap itself from the last hold on the plates that held it above and below, reach outward, its short braces like wild-waving arms clutching in the air for support. As it finished the backward lurch and plunged down, while he waited the seconds it took for the tons of steel to fall and the sound of their crash and splash to come up again—

"Yes—there it is," he repeated through white lips. It was the fulfilment of his presentiment that his dreams could not come true.

From where he stood he could see enough to know that twenty-four hours, with fifty men working at top speed, might save the whole east end of the bridge from buckling hopelessly; that it would take the best of

his command over those fifty men to get them at work on their promised holiday, and his constant presence with them to keep them at the work, he knew without seeing.

That three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of work depended on the promptness with which the remaining structure was re-braced and riveted; that two million dollars' worth of delay must result from failure; that half his own prestige would be lost in that delay—were obvious to his mind without a single thought.

He could not meet his bride in Machala. He might sacrifice the prestige to do so. The vast moneys were not his to sacrifice; they belonged to men who entrusted them upon their faith that he would do his best to preserve them.

He did not hesitate. Quick as the switch-board operator could be got his order ran to the big sleeping shacks, calling the engineers to their banked fires, and bidding them turn their whistles loose to scream the death-knell of the holiday.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHY DID I DO IT?"

THE steamer *Reina de Barbados* was on schedule time in rounding the point that marks the northwest corner of Guayaquil Bay. Sheltered from the sun by an awning the width of the vessel, the two dozen first-class passengers lined the rail, peering through glasses at the shore. Soon they picked up the cathedral tower of Guayaquil.

"Didn't shake it much, I guess," a tan-visaged young Briton remarked to another of his countrymen. Word of the earthquake had come by the ship's wireless.

"No-o," the other drawled disgustedly. "I'm going back to my bally book."

The first lingered a moment at the rail, seeming to ponder and decide against an attempt to engage the girl on his right in conversation. Then he retreated the few steps to the two chairs on one of which the other Briton was hunting his place in a novel.

"I say, what do you think of this yarn,

anyhow?" the second demanded without looking up from his search for the lost page.

"Same old bally rot," snapped the other. "If there's a topic I'm fed-up on it's the idea of a girl making a heroic sacrifice in marrying money for anybody's sake. To my mind she'd deserve more credit for blowing the rich duffer's safe. She cheats him on the deal quite as badly. He has some right to expect her love, and all he gets is her beautiful person. If I ever found out a woman had married me for my money, I think I'd keep her till I tired of it, and then take her to south Celebes and auction her off to the niggers to recover the half-value she'd done me for."

It was rough talk to make within ear-shot of the girl. She moved farther down the rail. Her face was aflame. But the color soon left it.

"What in blazes are you talking about?" the man with the book demanded of the one

who had just vouchsafed an opinion of it. "Certainly not this book."

"She's gettin' off here," the opinionated one replied.

"I say!" cried the other. "What—"

"I've been waitin' a chance to hand her a bit. If the chap she's marrying here isn't rich, I'll buy all the drinks for an hour. She's looked all the way as if the captain had told her she'd walk a plank over the stern at Guayaquil. Now, blessed if she don't look as if she saw 'em lashing the board in the middle."

"Aw, you're a bit touched yourself," jeered his companion.

"H-m!" murmured the other. "I've a fancy she was a damned pretty girl the last time she smiled."

The girl could not hear them now. Nor could they hear her, though her lips framed the words that seemed wrung from her soul:

"Oh, God! God! Why did I do it?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

TO-MORROW

TO-MORROW you'll put old scores to rest,
To-morrow the golden rule you'll test,
You're going to love your neighbor best—
To-morrow.

To-morrow you'll pause the cry to heed
Of the waif in want, the friend in need,
To-morrow you'll free yourself from greed—
To-morrow.

To-morrow you start to never more
Open your ears to the gossip bore,
Who whispers scandal of those next door—
To-morrow.

To-morrow you'll start no bills to owe;
From thenceforth on you'll pay as you go—
Economy thus you'll surely show—
To-morrow.

To-morrow you'll spare your wife a kiss
Such as you lavished on her as "miss."
You'll give her a taste of domestic bliss—
To-morrow.

To-morrow, in short, you'll brush your slate.
"I'll start life's sum afresh," you'll state.
To-morrow you'll say, "I think I'll wait—
Till to-morrow!"

Walter Pulitzer.

A Romance in Redemption

by William Dudley Pelley



This is the last of a series of three stories having to do with an up-to-the-minute subject, put into fiction form by a man who not only knows the ground thoroughly, but is also one of the most popular writers of stories in the country. The first story of the series appeared in our August 30 issue.

III—The Man From Chaos.

I.

A WILD blast shrieked from the locomotive's whistle. It pierced the Siberian night—a wail of despair. The brakes went on. The tracks were showered with trillions of sparks.

The huge engine leaped upward. With a wounded roar it gored the earth. Steel bars were twisted, rivets parted. Wooden car-braces and cross-pieces snapped like pipe-stems.

It was a terrible crash. For miles it echoed across the snow-bound steppes. An engine and forty huge Manchurian freight-cars piled blindly upon one another in a fearful juggernaut of destruction.

It was over in an instant.

The roar and the crash melted out into the eternal distances. An ominous quiet followed. Uncanny it was that so vast an organization as this mighty train could be rendered so quiet, so impotent in a moment.

Then a shriek from a human throat voiced the great tragic aftermath.

Once, twice, three times that shriek was repeated. A weird tremolo fluted through the night-air like the lowest note on a great organ. A hissing of steam grew louder.

Then a whole cloud of that steam lifted from the chaotic mass and hid the stars. Down close to earth, near the bottom of the pile, appeared one tiny flicker of livid flame. Viewed from a distance as the flame grew momentarily higher and brighter, moving figures appeared, some afoot, some ahorse. Like demons before a molten mountain they ran back and forth before the stupendous wreckage where all but the last three cars were salvage.

Special Red Triangle Train 72, *en route* eastward, Irkutsk to Vladivostok, had rounded a curve to find no iron where Trans-Siberian tracks were supposed to be.

The Bolsheviki had severed the line again.

It was bastard warfare in full operation.

For a moment Jim Herring lay stunned, striving to collect his scattered senses, to remember where he was and how he came there. Laboriously he traced it out.

First, there had been the nightmare. He had been riding a horse, a wild and fantastic animal, who bore him swiftly through Stygian darkness on hoofs that never touched earth. The animal had lost its footing. There had been a plunge off into the unfathomable darkness, the shock of contact with earth he could not see. Where was he, anyhow?

He moved slightly and was conscious of something lying across him. He put out a hand and felt its size and shape. After a long time, months and months, it seemed, it all came back to him.

He was in Siberia, a Red Triangle secretary in charge of a train of "empties." They would be taken back to Vladivostok and loaded with supplies for the Czech and British armies far afield. But the train had stopped. The great club-car bringing up the rear was tilted on an angle. A box-mattress from the bunk across the tiny apartment was skewed across him.

As he lay there seeking to think this all out he became conscious of excited voices, guttural shouts and hoarse orders given outside. A movement came near him. A human hand felt him over. He jumped and caught it in a grip of iron. Thereat he heard his name called in a weird whisper. He released the hand.

He felt hurriedly for his match-box and a tiny flame punctuated the darkness.

In front of him, half-clad, dazed with sleep or terror, or both, he beheld Josef, his Czechoslovak servant. Joe's rough-shaven features were ashen. His eyes were dilated. In one hand he had his regulation rifle with the bayonet fixed.

The match-fire died. Again they were two in thick darkness. Out of that darkness finally came the Czech's whisper. He said one word—one dread word:

"*Bolsheviki!*"

The American repeated the word foolishly for a time. Then he cried: "What's the matter with this car, Joe? What's it tipped up for? My God, we're *wrecked!*"

"*Bolsheviki!*" came Joe's panic-stricken whisper again.

Up in one corner, on the side tilted toward the stars, was a long, narrow window. Through this window began seeping a weak, sickly illumination from without. The American felt his way forward through the interior wreckage. He climbed up and tried to throw the window open. The angle at which the car was tilted, wedged it tightly.

"*Bolsheviki* have made wreck of train, Meester Herring. You leesten. We are capture!"

"Captured?" The American echoed the word blankly.

"*Etah* *Bolsheviki* outside," Joe whispered. "They think we are loaded train with supplies—"

Joe's words were drowned out by a sudden, terrific thumping on the padlocked car door, the side opposite from the window. Only rifle-butts could produce such an effect. Through the Y.-man's suddenly stampeded senses came the gist of what they were trying to make the occupants of the car understand. The shoutings were ugly commands to undo the padlocks, the rifle-butts abetting matters.

"The money, Joe!" cried Jim Herring, a bit hysterically.

For five months he had been hearing awful stories of the inhuman methods of the *Bolsheviki* with their prisoners. He had seen many sights in reconquered territory that awakened him from his night slumbers with icy sweat on his forehead. Now he was wrecked by these same *Bolsheviki*—they were just outside the door of the car, thumping down the obstruction. It was a nightmare of a situation that for a moment it seemed he should awaken from, even as he had awakened from the ride through the Stygian darkness on the galloping horse.

As the thumping became more and more insistent, Jim found himself clawing around for the mattress on which he had been sleeping.

Buried in that mattress for safe-keeping were one million rubles of old Czar money in notes of great denomination—Universal Harvester Company funds which he had

promised to carry safely out of that land of chaos and transfer to America *via* Japan.

II.

LOUDER and more threatening grew both pounding and foul profanity.

The attempt to get into the car was all a piece of foolishness at best—nothing less than a battering-ram the size and shape of a telegraph-pole could break down the sturdy plank door. For the moment the two inside the car were safe. But only for the moment. The train was burning. With a cry of despair the Czech discovered it.

"The money first, Joe! We've got to lug along this money. Get a light—for God's sake find a candle!"

Joe struck a match somehow and found a stub of candle sticking to a bench. He got it lighted.

The American caught up a valise lying partly under the bunk. Into it from his mattress he began dumping packages of money—fine lithographed notes on paper as heavy as parchment with watermarked likenesses of the old royal family beneath the exquisite engraving. He counted his packages and snapped shut the valise.

From beneath his pillow he secured his automatic. With the valise in one hand and the weapon in the other he backed out to the middle of the tilted floor. There he did some dynamic thinking.

For the first time in his career Jim Herring was up against the primal. He was a city man, editorial worker on a great sensational American paper—a paper whose patriotism had been more than open to question—which had sent Jim to the Far East to stir up trouble between Japan and America and keep American boys out of Europe. It was a far different Jim Herring in a Red Triangle uniform in Siberia from the Jim Herring who, five months before, had sailed from San Francisco. But that is beside the point. The law of the city is hardly the law of the jungle. The fittest survive there by the battle of wits. Here Jim Herring must fight physically in order to live. He must kill or be killed. There was no escape from it. He had been forced to a wall. His courage at the moment was the frenzy of desperation.

"We got to get out of here, Joe. We got to get out of here in a damned big hurry!"

"We will be shot, Meester Herring. You leesten! Bolsheviki everywhere!"

"Maybe, Joe. But I don't intend to roast here in any fiery furnace. One Yank is good for every fifty of those scum, and one Yank and one Czech are good for two hundred. Are you with me?"

"Sure I follow you, Meester Herring."

"All right; there's only one way out. We're going through that window. Get me?"

With the glare that outlined the corner window increasing, the American started for the aperture. With a bang of his heavy valise he knocked the panes into a thousand slivers. A couple more lunges smashed out the sash.

"Here goes, Joe. Out of the frying-pan into the fire. Watch my smoke and keep close to it."

And the Yankee squirmed through.

He went through so suddenly that he surprised even himself.

The window was on the side of the car tilted upward. The man felt himself sliding, going down the inclined walls on his chest. He thrust out the bag to break the shock of the impact. He landed with a smash on his side. Instantly a man fell on top of him.

But it was only the Czech coming down after.

Down the deep gully beside the track the two men rolled, an avalanche of men, valise and broken snow-crust. Because of the gully there had been none of the attacking Reds on that side of the train.

The two crouched there at the bottom of the ditch for a moment, awaiting the inevitable shooting to follow.

The inevitable shooting did not follow. The noise and confusion on the other side of the wreck had momentarily covered their escapade.

Crouching low, carrying the precious valise in one hand and with his automatic ready for instant's use in the other, Jim Herring started away from the burning train. The Czech followed closely on his heels.

They came finally to a clump of bushes,

sear and naked in the winter night breeze. But they were thick enough to serve as a screen. Keeping these willows in line to cover their retreat, they reached the curve around which a few moments before the great train had come hurtling to find annihilation ahead.

Far around the curve and down the tracks, the great starlit arch of the Asiatic heavens hanging over them and the vaster snow-bound steppes rolling away into oblivion, the American paused for breath.

"We're saved—for the moment, anyhow," he panted.

He turned then to look at the Czech. For the man was staggering. He reeled and went down on the frosty tracks. There he sprawled, ominously still. Herring dropped the bag, knelt beside him, straightened him out.

"God in heaven! Don't go soft on me now, Joe!" he cried. "What's the matter, old man? What's happened?"

But the Czech was unconscious.

Then Herring saw.

From the Bohemian's face and neck blood throbbed. It was a sickening wound. Josef had not been so fortunate as the Yankee in clearing the jagged glass of the car window.

After a moment the man rallied, for his fiber was toughened by three years of campaigning.

"Go on!" he gasped feebly. "Leave me and make safety for yourself, Meester Herring. Me, I am cut with the glass. Make safety for *yourself*, I tell you!"

Herring glanced around desperately.

A year, a month, yes, a week before, Jim Herring might have thought only of his own skin and accepted the advice. But Jim Herring, the big city newspaperman, was being remade out here in this wild land of Siberia. The craven yellow of all his former life was being ironed out of him. He was learning what it meant to be a man.

"The devil I will!" he cried hoarsely. "We've fought our way so far together, old man. We stick it out now or we croak here, shoulder to shoulder. Let me tie you up somehow in this handkerchief."

"Make safety for yourself!" cried the Czech. "Leesten! They are coming—

Bolsheviki!" He fought for strength. "Go! Go!"

"Never!" snapped Jim Herring.

The sound of hoarse shouting grew nearer.

"Get up, Joe! For God's sake, get up!" cried the Yankee.

The Czech tried nobly. But he was growing momentarily weaker from quantities of lost blood. He staggered to his feet. But the starlit world reeled about him. His knees went limp and he crumpled.

"Please, please, Meester Herring. Make safety for yourself!" he cried heroically.

It was a terrible half moment. Every instinct of self-preservation in the Yankee called out within him to flee. And there was the money for which he was responsible. But there are sacrifices in the human soul which only one psychological moment in a lifetime brings to the surface. This was one of those moments.

There were no heroics, no speeches made in this one big moment in Jim Herring's life. He simply caught up the bag of rubles and cast it from him as far as his strength could heave it. Over on the other side of the gully it landed. Its weight broke through the soft crust and it disappeared from sight. The American marked the spot where it fell by a cope of denuded willows. He could gamble on recovering it later. Then he knelt by the prostrate man and sought to stanch the flow of blood on face and neck.

So, because of his loyalty to a comrade in a common predicament, Jim Herring, the yellow journal war correspondent, was captured.

III.

THE Red Guards came up, shooting, but none of their bullets made their mark, and Herring had the good sense not to return the fire regardless of his hysteria and the invitation his automatic afforded. He was one man against a company with a single magazine of cartridges. It meant suicide.

He waited, tense in every muscle, expecting the shock of the bullet-impact. Then, seeing that his hands were above his head, they ceased firing and came upon him, bellying senselessly.

They were a wild, outlandish crew, and the starlight exaggerated their savagery. They were the most ignorant and brutal of the Russian peasants, poor dupes and tools in the hands of arch-conspirators and bloody idealists.

They were rigged out in a weird and ludicrous assortment of nondescript clothing. There were many old Czar army uniforms, tattered and torn. Many of the coats appeared to have been resurrected from a rummage sale; they were dirty and crumpled and shoddy. Most of them wore the characteristic Russian boots looted from corpses on some previous battle-field. Some had high, outlandish sheepskin hats; others wore the caps of the old Russian army which they had deserted with the coming of "freedom." There was no order among them; no organization.

"Americansky!" they shouted at Herring ominously.

"Da!" admitted Jim.

Now that they had captured him, they seemed at a loss to know what to do with their prize. Jim recognized their indecision.

"*Perevo'tcheek!*" demanded the American. It was a request for an interpreter. He could understand Russian, but he could not yet speak it fluently, at least not enough to put over the fine points of argument which he felt must follow.

Again they were at a loss. Surrounding him, they took counsel among themselves. Finally an undersized Russian was brought forward. He was a sickly, anemic young fellow with an eyebrow mustache.

"I speaka Engleesh with you," he volunteered.

"Where did you learn how to speak English?" the American demanded.

"I liva once small time Seattle."

"Well, tell me what the devil this all means, anyhow?"

The man repeated the demand in Russian and it brought a burst of angry declamation.

"Tell them," went on Jimmy before the reply was made, and instantly seizing the advantage, "that America is friendly to Russia, and there's going to be hell to pay for treating a soldier of Uncle Sam like this!"

The message was translated. It caused more excited conversation, principally motions with the hands. The debate ran fast and furious. Then the American was treated to the big surprise of that awful night. Not only did they appear to accept his word for this statement but it bore weight with them. The mob was divided, further at a loss, wondering if they had indeed committed some colossal blunder.

Much that is vicious has been written and circulated in the Allied countries (and ninety per cent of it is true) concerning the Russian Bolsheviki. Yet one who understands the fundamentals beneath the great Slav chaos and the timber from which the Red army has been recruited, can make allowance for many things.

If they are fiendish in their warfare, it is because that is the way of an ignorant peasant army all through history. If they are brutal, it is because the whirlwind is being reaped in Russia from seeds sown down all the years. In their hearts and their heads they are children. Their philosophy, their *modus operandi* for righting their wrongs is open to a sophisticated and educated world's censure. But underneath all the bloodshed, all the chaos, all the horror is a vast sentiment for universal justice.

They are swayed by every influence with which they come in contact. They are ever open to argument. Their methods are crude, but their incentive is a blind groping for fairness—at least in the rank and file. And so, not being momentarily maddened for killing, they were open to debate on the thing they were doing.

Intuitively Jim Herring grasped the situation. Again he determined to make the most of it. In a still more authoritative voice, hardly giving them time to answer, he demanded:

"Why have you wrecked an American-sky train—America, who is over here to help Russia?"

Finally the young Russian turned to him.

"Because we have receive word come by telegraph Americansky take big lot ruble out of Russia. Soviet order to kill all who take money out of Russia."

"A big lot of money out of Russia? *Me?* Somebody's been stuffing you!"

"You have got money? You are carry out money belong say Universal Harvester Company, *yist?*"

Jim assumed a perplexed attitude.

"Once, quite a while ago, I had something to do with some Universal Harvester Company money to oblige a friend. I haven't got it now."

"Where has went, please?"

"You can search me. All I was doing was to return some empty cars in that train you piled up—to Vladivostok. You don't see any money on me, do you, or about me here?"

"You let us search, please."

"Go to it! You've got the wrong man, I tell you."

The young Russian conveyed this to his companions. Two burly proletariat were elected to go through the American's clothing.

In the still more dubious debate which followed their ill-fortune, Jim detected references to "*vaggon*," and that they had searched his car thoroughly after breaking in and finding him gone.

Secretly in his heart the American began to lose his terror of the dreaded Bolsheviks. They were simply a lot of poor, illiterate people running amuck.

He remembered what an old Red Triangle veteran had said to him in Vladivostok when he first came up from Japan: "Wherever three are gathered together in Russia there are two debating societies." If he could keep up the argument with these brute men with child-minds, his superior education and wits might yet find a loophole to save his skin and the rubles, also. Force would mean suicide. Diplomacy was his cue.

"But you had money," came back the interpreter doggedly. "We have receive word you come from Blagovyeshensk with much money. You have not lose money while come. Where is? Not find money in *chasn'ny vaggon*. You tell."

"I can't tell you the location of something I haven't got. And even if I had it, how could the Soviet put me to death for taking money out of Russia when I haven't taken it out? Even if you had caught the money on me, I wouldn't yet have com-

pleted the deed. And a man cannot be punished for a deed until he has committed and completed it. Where's the logic in your argument, anyhow?"

Inwardly the Yankee chuckled, for the young Russian disclosed by his blank face that he was trying to reason it out himself. He turned and translated the Yankee's words to those who demanded what the Americansky was saying. They were all appropriately impressed. It was crude; a silly argument. But they gave it all due consideration. Hats came off. A general scratching of heads followed, likewise a shrugging of shoulders.

"We have make big damage of *po'yest* (train) for no money, *yist?*"

"It kind of looks that way."

Another burly Russian in a high army cap, an ulster, and several ludicrous decorations, shoved his way forward. He argued vehemently as though to end the nonsense. He laid down the law to his companions and the interpreter, casting ominous glances at Jim Herring.

"He say," translated the interpreter, "you tell dam' big quick where is money or we use *shtyk* (bayonet)."

"And you tell him," returned Herring with as much courage as he could muster, for he felt the tide going against him, "that he is one big fool. Suppose I did know where the money was—which I don't admit—by using force, by killing me, he spoils forever his chance of learning the knowledge I may possess. You tell him that if you boys will treat me decently, let me send some telegrams, to be sure I am right, I may be able to locate the money for you."

Jim's heart gave a leap. He saw that he had conveyed an impression that he had left the money behind in some interior city. The big Russian was angry when Jim's words were translated, incensed at being called a fool. But the Yankee's willingness to aid them to acquire the loot impressed them. The doubting, pacific element in the crowd dominated.

"You let us read telegrams first—*yist?*" demanded the interpreter. "You not play any trick to tell White Guards we are here—nor Czechoslovak?"

"Sure you can read my telegrams. You'd

have to put them into Russian for me, anyhow—I can't write your language."

"*Prekrah'snah! Kara'shah!* (very good)," they declared after a time. They seemed to accept him as one of them. The burly Russian was shoved in the back-ground.

During this conversation Josef had lain prone on the tracks outside the circle. A prostrate man at the time was so common a sight that he attracted far less attention than a live one in a foreign uniform, like Jim Herring. Now Josef groaned. He was returning a second time to consciousness.

They turned. Some one struck a light. They noted the uniform.

"Czecho-Slovak!" went up the wild, bel-lowing cry.

Jim Herring sprang forward.

"*Wait!*" he cried. A rifle-butt had been raised. A Red Guard instantly had recognized a known enemy and was about to exterminate him. The Yankee lunged at the man with the gun upraised. He held him, the other shouting angrily.

"You interpreter!—Come here! Tell this bunch that what goes for me goes for this friend of mine, also. If you want me to help you recover the money, you treat this chap like you'd treat one of your own wounded. It will go far better for you to have me for a friend than an enemy. I'll answer for him."

It was a difficult job to hold them off. The Czech's life hung in the balance. Furious argument followed. Twice more was the Czech on the point of being brained; America might or might not be friendly to the Bolsheviki; they could give the American the benefit of the doubt. But the Czechs they knew. There was no quarter. They had proved themselves enemies.

Again the logical pacific element dominated, but it was a sullen submission.

"*Kara'shah!*" they declared finally. The interpreter said: "It is for you that they do not keel him, *Beregee'tes!*"

They suffered Jim to pick up his wounded comrade.

"*Eedee'te sah mno'i,*" ordered the big Russian who had advocated force. And they followed him, back up the tracks toward the burning train.

Jim had not a notion where he was headed for. But he was getting the crowd out of the neighborhood of the bag of rubles, and that was the thing of the moment.

"Where are we going?" he demanded of the interpreter.

"We go village; leetle way off," indicated the other with a sweep of his arm to the south. "You tell us where is money—*yist?*" This last was a coax in a voice almost fawning.

"It all depends how my friend and I get treated. How do we get to this village?"

"*Lo'shat* (horse)," the other answered.

As they strung back up the tracks toward the cars and the horses, Jim Herring did some more dynamic thinking. The train was wrecked; he was marooned now in the great heart of war-time Siberia; he could gain nothing by refusing to go with the Red Guards. To remain out here on the tracks was suicidal; he and the Czech would perish of cold and hunger. For if the Bolsheviki had cut the lines, as was evident, an Allied rescue train might not get through for days, and perhaps for weeks. Far better to make common cause with these illiterates and trust to luck and the fortunes of war to slip through their clutches later.

But as they left the neighborhood, Jim walked purposely close to the nearest verst post. All along the Trans-Siberian are these distance signs indicating the number of verst or Russian miles to the nearest great city—as cities go in Siberia. The number was 849. The bag of rubles had been cast in the snow on the opposite side of the gully near verst-post 849. He would remember.

That burning train was one of the most stupendous sights Jim Herring beheld during all his Odyssey in Russia. The entire forty cars were now completely wrapped in flames—a frightful, roaring furnace. The holocaust made a glare that reached for miles toward heaven, and the fitful night-breeze carried the sparks and cinders hundreds of verst across the steppes.

But what of that? What was one train more or less to great Russia?

Orders were shouted above the roaring and the crackle. A horse was brought to

Jim Herring through the confusion. He was helped to the high Tatar saddle. The wounded Czech was delivered over to a more experienced rider. Jim balanced himself in the outlandish seat as best he could, and the pony started, nearly spilling him.

Then they fled the scene, carrying away such small plunder as the wreck, before the flames got under way, had afforded. In a long, motley file they strung out and headed southward.

It became a wild, weird dream to Jim Herring. He was one of the world-notorious Bolsheviks, riding with them into the interior.

He cast a last look at the crumpling train and wondered if he would ever again see a railroad.

IV.

At nine-thirty the following morning, in far-away Vladivostok, a big-boned American, in a Red Triangle uniform of rank, sat at his desk in a big stone mansion overlooking the city. A messenger entered—a young Yankee in civilian clothes. He delivered an envelope with a message that had come through from the American railway engineers at Harbin, and had been first to the American consulate.

The big-bodied Red Triangle official read the yellow slip, lowered it, leaned back sadly in his chair, and gazed out of the tall, wide window before him. Then he arose tragically and strode into the adjoining room.

Another American was in there, an old-young man in civilian clothes who, a year before, had been a college professor in Wisconsin. The latter took the slip proffered without comment. Then he uttered an exclamation of dismay:

"And we needed those cars so badly," he lamented.

"To the devil with the cars!" cried the big Yankee in khaki. "We can get new cars, if we have to make them. But we can't make new men. I was thinking of Herring."

"There's the chance that he may not have been killed."

"But if they have broken through the Czech line and seized our train, I wouldn't

give much for Herring's chances. I'd rather be killed in the capture of a train than fall into our clutches."

The old-young man in civilian clothes laid down his pen. On his face, too, came the sadness.

"It's too bad," he agreed finally. "You know Herring came up here and took this job because he was in love with one of the Red Cross girls. They separated when he went in country. She's just come back from Kharborosk. The first place she hit for was here. She wanted word of him. Her delight when I told her that Herring was due Saturday with the empties was pathetic. And now—"

"The Bolsheviks have undoubtedly got him. And you know what they did to Harper."

The old-young man nodded silently. He tore a piece of paper into tiny bits absently.

The messenger from the consulate had overheard from the doorway:

"A consignment of Czechs have been ordered westward this afternoon," he declared. "Gaida can't stand it to have the Reds in control of a foot of railroad between here and Omsk. If the line is cut, the Czechs in there will starve."

"Or worse," commented the college professor. "We'll hope for the best, anyhow. God pity this unhappy country!"

V.

THE clammy, cutting zero-hour of dawn found Jim Herring and the line of outlandish horsemen drawing near to a ragged Siberian village.

There was one main street running north and south, beginning and ending on the open steppes. The American had heard the middle of the Pacific given as the loneliest spot on God's footstool. He knew as they entered the place that the people who supported that theory had never been in a center-Siberian village off the line of the railroad.

On the east and west sides of the one wide street, which was furrowed like a long strip of frozen, plowed land, a motley assortment of log huts and mud houses had been constructed. They were one-room shanties with small windows, those made of logs

chinked up with clay. Out behind them, away over the rolling land, were fenced cattle enclosures constructed through the skillful employment of saplings bent together or intertwined. The only sign of life in the place was one villainous-appearing Manchurian Chinaman in a coat of undressed goatskin that brushed the ground, who crossed the single street and disappeared in a hovel. That, and a tiny wisp of smoke that arose from one of the houses.

It was daylight when they stopped before the one building of size in the community, though the sun had not yet risen. The Yankee was weary and chafed from his ride. When he lowered himself to the frozen snow-crusted ground, he almost sank to his knees.

The leader of the detachment took charge of him—in none too gracious a manner. The exhausted Czech was brought along on a pair of broad shoulders after the fashion of a bag of meal. His wound had stopped bleeding, though it was a ghastly sight to behold. The interpreter, per orders, also went into the house with them.

"You stay here until we get the money," the latter said after listening to instructions from his superior. "You will be treated pretty good, *da!* But you must not try tricks. Russian woman will come quick, fix up Czech-Slovak. You will send telegrams—*yist?*"

"I want a chance to think this thing out first; don't rush me. The money is in Allied hands—I must find some way to get it out for you. First I want this man taken care of."

"*Kara'shah,*" agreed the interpreter. "I bring paper and pencil for you to write telegrams. When can we get the rubles?"

"I don't know," confessed Jim Herring truthfully. "It will take time—and brains. Get us something to eat. I am hungry."

A Russian woman came in half an hour later, bringing a large bowl of *bos'ch*, a dish of stewed cabbage and beef. She remained to help Jim dress the Bohemian's wound. It was a-sickening, ghastly business at best, for the Czech had been bled nearly white. But it was done, though it left Jim faint in the stomach.

The leader of the crew growled about the

place for a time and then withdrew. Jim and the Czech and the Russian woman and the interpreter were alone. The American looked around.

He was in a room about fifteen feet square. The walls were of logs, likewise the floor. Some of them had not been hewed flat; once he nearly turned an ankle. There were two windows with tiny, filthy panes of glass, admitting the morning sunshine but dimly. Both were sealed for the winter after the manner of all Russian houses.

Over against the south wall was built a brick oven stove. There was a bench-table, the ever-present icon or saint's picture high in a dim corner, a couple of stools. And piled in another corner were great stacks of printed sheets. To Jim Herring they looked like newspapers.

"For Heaven's sake, what are those?" he demanded, indicating the papers.

"Ah, Bolsheviki what—you—call—it—ah, *propaganda!*"

"But are they newspapers?"

"*Da!* Newspaper."

To find newspapers afar off here on the steppes in such an environment jolted the Yankee as much as he would have been startled to open the door of this Siberian house and come upon an old friend. It was incredible, but he had to believe his own eyes. The papers were there.

"But who the devil reads newspapers, off here?" he demanded.

The interpreter shrugged his shoulders.

"Come from Petrograd," was all he explained.

Jim crossed the room, pulled aside the hemp binder-twine with which the papers were done in bundles of fifty and a hundred and separated a handful of the documents.

"About Bolshevism?" he demanded.

"*Da,*" affirmed the other. "You read Russian?"

"Some," Jim admitted.

He glanced the sheets over. They were copies of papers similar to hundreds of similar periodicals which had sprung up all over Russia and Siberia since the revolution. It was all part of the irony of the chaos that these large numbers of propaganda papers had been sent to this land-lost little village where so few could read.

"Say," demanded the American suddenly, "what's this Bolsheviki business all about anyhow?"

The Russian's features lighted. It was pathetic. He was one of the impractical dreamer types with which great Russia is clogged at the moment; he saw in the lean, capable American a possible convert.

"You wait," he said. "I bring Ivanoff! He tell you." The young man paused at the door. "But you were to send telegrams about the money."

"Sure," admitted Jim. He was apparently interested, deeply interested, in what he saw in the paper before him.

The Russian went out. Jim turned and saw that his Czech friend was regarding him out of feverish but understanding eyes.

"We're in one of their headquarters villages, I guess, Joe. This pile of literature looks like it. And we're in a mighty tight place. But we've got to carry the bluff through somehow—"

"I hear you—make talk—about telegraph," whispered the Czech.

"Sure. I'm fourflushing, making them think I'm going to send wires that'll wise them where those rubles are."

"To who will you send, Meester Herring. What will you make say?"

"Damned if I know, Joe," returned the other honestly. "Our only chance of getting out of here is keeping our wits!"

"Why did they not keel me, Meester Herring?"

"Because I raised hell about it, Joe."

The Czech lay silent for a few moments.

"You are brave man and good friend, Meester Herring," he declared finally.

"I'm a coward—and a cheap skate," returned the American thickly.

It was the first time in his life that any one had ever called him a brave man.

"We've got to get out of here, Joe, and when we leave we've got to have that money. I've got to get back to America. I've got a new job cut out for me."

The Czech turned his wounded head away.

"We never get out, Meester Herring," he whispered. "You do not know Bolsheviki."

"Perhaps not. But I know a girl some-

where in this country of blood and junk who's got a date with me in Vladivostok to get married when the business is over. And the whole damned Kaiser's army can't keep me from her. You go to sleep and get your strength back. Within the coming three or four days—if the gods let us live that long, we're going to have our work cut out for us and you'll need your nerve and your muscle—"

"What will you do, Meester Herring?"

"I've got several schemes. One of them has occurred to me since arriving in this dung-hole. I'll tell you when you're in better shape to hear it."

Their conversation was cut short by the return of the interpreter with a companion. The former had pencil and paper.

"You had better write telegraph," he suggested cannily.

"I'm agreeable," Jim declared.

He smiled. He took the pencil and paper and crossed to the table. There he sat for a time, chewing the lead of the pencil.

"How will you get this message sent?" he demanded when he had it completed.

"We have telegraph man, little station somewhere, is Bolsheviki."

"Aren't the wires cut?"

"No wire Vladivostok. Wire Blagovyeschensk all very good."

"All right. Send this message to Blagovyeschensk. And tell your commandant that it is going to take a few days to run this money down. If he will be patient I will do my best for him."

The man took the paper. On it Jim had written:

H. C. WHEELER:

Czecho-Slovak Headquarters,
Blagovyeschensk, Siberia.

When will Chapman leave with the money?
Am delayed. Can carry it through and save
him trip. Answer care of bearer.

HERRING.

"Instruct your Bolsheviki agent who will probably deliver that wire, to return his answer here, supplying the secret address which you can give him. It is up to you. When I get the reply, we will see what further steps will be advisable. One cannot capture a million rubles in a moment."

The young man's face wore a crestfallen

look. But he saw no reason to suspect the American's good faith. Was he not wiring for the exact location of the party who *did* have the money? They could at least wait and see what came of it.

So he went out, carrying the script to his superior, who was likewise satisfied, though disgruntled over the delay.

Through agencies known only to the Red Guards themselves, the message was that day started on its way toward the far interior city which Jim had left eight days before.

"But that does not help escape of you and me, Meester Herring!" protested the Czech.

"Keep your shirt on, old man. I'm stalling for time. You see, I've got a system."

"But the answer which comes back must make beg disappointment; they will be angry to kill with us."

"I'll risk the answer. You see, that wire doesn't refer to Universal Harvester Company funds at all—you and I and perhaps a few Bolsheviki are the only ones aware that they exist. My question refers to a lot of Y. M. C. A. funds for supplies sold to soldiers. Wheeler will answer it so. But our Bolshevik friends will never know the difference. Don't let's cross bridges until we come to them. Go to sleep, Joe. Meanwhile I'm going to puzzle out the clap-trap in these propaganda newspapers."

VI.

A QUEER change came over the "soldat from America" in the next two days. The house where he was confined resembled a perpetual debating society. There was much coming and going of men in uniforms and men without uniforms. All day long the peasants of the place thronged his room, sat about on the stools and benches and argued with him through the overworked and somewhat disgruntled interpreter.

He told them stories about far-away America and the wrongs of the poor people who lived there. He discussed policies of government and Utopian society with them. And in turn they asked him questions.

They demanded to know if the sky was blue in America as it was in Siberia. They related the information given them by a

recent German visitor that all the horses outside of Russia had two legs, and was it so? If it was, would the Americansky draw them a picture of a horse with two legs with his pencil?

They pictured to him the state of society soon to come in Russia, when the hated *bourgeoisie* should be gone and every man should have two suits of clothes and all the land he wanted and a machine that sang music like the throat of a woman. And it went around the village and was reported to the gangs of mounted soldiers who passed to and fro through the place: the Americansky was being converted to the Bolsheviki.

It was seemingly so. He called for the local leaders and to them gave high information of affairs to the westward and the strength and morale of the Slovak soldiers. He abused the dog of a Czech who had first come with him. He tore off his Americansky capitalistic soldier's uniform: he wore a Russian coat and a sheepskin hat and swore angrily when no answer came to his telegram, for the poor people of the village and the people's army needed the money.

Then he proved his sincerity beyond all question: The dog of a Czech, abused beyond all endurance, made his escape in the night. And because the Americansky knew him so well and where he would head to rejoin his comrades, the Americansky was put in command of a detachment of horse and they overtook the Czech and captured him, far to the northeastward.

"No," declared the Americansky grimly, "we will not kill him—not yet. I, your brother from America, have need of him. Comrades, give his life to me. I will make him miserable, but I will use him for the purposes of the people—in my own time with his own fellow soldiers."

So the Czechs torturous existence was prolonged. The men of the settlement learned that he had once attempted suicide. The Americansky had checkmated him. Wherefore, the people criticised the Americansky.

"Wait! In my own good time I shall have use for him, maybe to get you the money."

Those were nightmare days for Jim Herring. He did not know whether he would remain alive from hour to hour. His face was blanched, but stern when three Cosacks who had been captured were disemboweled while tied to a rail fence on the edge of the village. Two days later a soldier of the experimental Siberian government at Omsk was brought in and shot within twenty feet of the Yankee. The mutilations of the man's corpse afterward were as disgusting as they were senseless. Jim had to shut himself away in his house, where he buried his face in his hands to recover from the nausea.

Another day, a veer of public sentiment, a suspicion of two-faced play, and he and the Czech might follow. He prayed that the telegram might reach Wheeler somehow and that the man might answer something—if only a word to show Jim was working and acting in apparent good faith—something in which he might build an excuse for more time. For time was needful to his purpose.

On the fifth day it came, by what route being one of the mysteries of that mysterious country. It read:

HERRING:

Cannot understand your wire. Where are you? Last report Red Guards had cut line your last heard location. Money will start Vladivostok soon as surety received line is again open. Advise,

WHEELER.

Again for a time was the American's life saved. They knew then that the Yankee could tell the whereabouts of the money—that he was working for them.

Jim called for the interpreter. He had this message transcribed:

WHEELER:

Mistake somewhere. Line O. K. Wreck obstructing track. Will be held up two weeks. Join me Chita Junction.

HERRING.

"Five days more of grace," breathed the Red Triangle man when the messenger had departed with the Bolshevik leaders, highly satisfied. "Oh, well, empires have been lost and won in less than five days."

At noon of the following day a horse-

man came flying across the steppes. Into the village, his pony foaming, he swung with hoarse shoutings, and cast himself from his saddle before the commandant's door.

The entire village was appraised of his coming. They turned out *en masse*—peasants, soldiers, filthy, evil-looking Chinamen, Khirgese and Tatars.

"The Czechs!" they cried. "The Czechs are coming!"

Among all of them only the American preserved his poise. He went hurriedly to the commandant's office, dragging the interpreter—who was an overworked man of late, growing more and more tired of his job—along with him. The big, stolid-faced Russian received him impatiently.

"Let us hold counsel together," urged Jim Herring. "I have been with these people, I know them—their strength and their weaknesses. We have naught to fear from them. There is no force hereabout large enough to cause us serious damage. They are desperate men, hoping against hope for supplies and reinforcements from the capitalists. Let us trick them and add vast numbers to the people's army."

"*Dal!*" growled the big leaders when the proposal had been translated. And he demanded to be told the *modus operandi*.

"First," declared the Yankee, "let us make capture of their leaders. Then let us demoralize them by spreading our documents and doctrines among them."

"It cannot be done," rejoined the dogged Russian.

"I, the American, can do it," affirmed Herring. "I know these people. I hold their confidence. I will send a note to their leader. He will come to me and you shall capture him."

"And who will take this note that can get through their lines?"

"Ah! You see why I saved the life of the dog of a Czech with me until this moment. He will carry the message through."

"A fine scheme," returned the commandant sarcastically. "There is too much room for treachery. He will get through his lines and never return. He will not betray his own people."

"I will stand sponsor for him."

"How?"

"I will remain here with you as hostage. If he does not return, his mission accomplished, I offer my life."

The commandant was impressed. He pulled at his heavy mustache reflectively.

"But the army—"

"The propaganda has been lying here for weeks—more deadly than bullets. We will put the Czech in a cart, a peasant's cart covered with hay. In the cart we will hide all this literature. You will give him permission to pass through your lines. He will get through his own by the knowledge of his countrymen. Once in, secretly he will do the damage. I promise it. The rest will be easy. Even though they do not desert in large numbers, their morale will be shattered. It will be easy to attack them. And for the success of the plan I promise myself. Brother, am I not sincere?"

The commandant dismissed him. He would think it over. The danger of the Czechs was imminent. To capture the leader would be capital. Yes, he would think it over.

Great numbers of Red Guards came riding over the steppes during the rest of the day. The approach of the Slovaks was not unlike a prairie fire that swept over vast spaces, driving the wild life out of their holes and homes before it. The land-lost little settlement became an armed camp of guerrilla warriors, a motley nightmare crew, superdevils in their desperation, illiteracy, and blood lust.

At four o'clock the commandant sent for him. It would at least be worth trying. At best they would lose but the one Czech prisoner and for that loss the American would pay with his own life. Yes, the Czech might go through the lines and deliver the Americansky's message if that message could be inspected and censored beforehand.

In the log room for one brief instant, the Yankee and the Bohemian were left alone together.

"Joel!" cried the former brokenly as he gripped the other's hand. "I trust you!"

"You are a brave man and a good friend," replied the other, his eyes welling with tears—for the Czech is a white man and he wears his heart like the Anglo-

Saxon, upon his sleeve. "I—will—not—fail—you—if I get through safely."

The message was prepared. The cart was brought—the springless little four-wheeled wagon of the Siberian peasant. The Czech was allowed to depart.

At the end of the street Josef looked back. Jim was standing in the midst of an excited mob of poor human dross, staking his life on the success of his friend's mission. The Czech wanted to wave, but dared not. He was supposed to be going under coercion. So he turned the chunky little pony due eastward and, out on the bumpy steppes, lashed him into a gallop.

VII.

THE battle of Biisk began in the late night. A rifle-shot snapped in the darkness. An awful yell followed the report—cries which brought lights in the windows of huts and the long town street became thronged with hysterical, bewildered, half-dressed, and half-armed people.

The single rifle-shot was followed by a boom. One after another came a dozen massive reports. The street was a seething mass. Horses of the calvary out behind on the edge of the steepes, stampeded. There was cursing, struggling; a senseless pandemonium.

Armored automobiles bore down on the village. Long lines of infantry, armed with machine guns, closed in from their concealed positions. The night became livid with death and terror. Half-dressed women ran about, clutching screaming children. Men mixed with the human chaos beneath the starlit darkness and were swept backward and forward like sheep in a shambles.

The commandant, despite the guards he had posted, had received no warning. His hoarse commands were unheeded. He struck to and fro with his huge sword, slashing and felling his own people. And a ring of fire surrounded the village and the streets were filled with writhing, screaming figures who flopped crazily on the frozen ground and were trampled.

Jim Herring started upward. The guard which had been posted to watch him since he had become a hostage for the Czech, had orders to kill at the first sign of treach-

ery. From his stool near the door where he had been napping, he rose up wildly at the first crack of battle. Jim Herring was upon him.

Over and over on the floor the two men rolled and the rifle with the bayonet clattered to a corner. They reeled against the bench-table. It went over. The candle, stuck in the vodka bottle, flickered a moment and then went out. Barbarism was enacted on the rough log floor between the two antagonists in the darkness.

Finally, with the Russian's fingers at his throat crushing the life from his lungs, Jim Herring's hand came in contact with one of the two stools with which the apartment was furnished. He gripped a leg and struck with the bit of poor furniture blindly.

Insanely, with every instinct of self-preservation, again and again he belted at the form that bore down, bearlike, upon him. The fingers loosened. With a crazy sob, the American squirmed from under. Rising, he stumbled over the rifle. He lurched for it. The bayonet caught in the table. He yanked it loose and he stabbed with it.

It was murder, and an awful sensation tore through the American. This was indeed getting back to fundamentals, back to the primal and the survival of the fittest. The contorted hulk crumpled. The American let the rifle sag, the bayonet still in his enemy's body.

He caught up the stool which had saved him. With it he belted out the sash and the window. Out into the death and destruction he vaulted. Close to earth he crawled on his stomach. His direction was toward the attack, not away from it.

Flames began to light the village. A hut on the edge of the street had been fired. It burned like a box of tinder. Wild and weird rose the barbaric conflagration.

It disclosed masses of men rushing blindly to and fro, some on foot, some on horses. It showed snipers behind the corners of fences, the roofs of outbuildings. Above the boom and the crackle and the roar came the shrieks of wounded ponies and the bellying of cattle.

A shot from a heavily armored automo-

bile struck a flimsy roof and tore it so that it sagged with its weight of dead and dying human beings. Another building caught the flames. It was deserted by its occupants and they were shot as they ran from it. The Red Guards gathered the evening before to protect the place, found such mounts as they were able, and started off across the steppes, a detachment of Czechs hotly after them. The flames mounted higher. The din became more bewildering, terrifying, deafening. The place was being exterminated.

The American lay inert on his back, his arms outthrown, his eyes fixed on the stars. A detachment of mounted men swept past within a rod of him, enemy or friendly, he could not discern in the nightmare of their onrush. When it had passed, he rolled over slowly and crawled still farther.

Luck had been with him. He thought so, at least. But after a quarter-mile of crawling from the settlement he found suddenly that his left arm refused to function. He sat up and felt it over. A terrific pain went seething through it. His hand was warm and slippery with a sickening dampness.

He had been shot as he came through the window! In his excitement he had never noticed it.

At twenty minutes past two that morning the town of Biisk was a furnace.

Daylight broke at twenty minutes to seven.

The winter sun arose and looked down on another tragedy of the intervention in great Siberia.

VIII.

THE American opened his eyes. Again, as he had in the Red Triangle Club car, he tried to place his location.

And then Jim Herring saw a vision—and he knew that he was in heaven.

Over him bent a ministering angel—an angel whom he had seen many nights in his dreams—a celestial being on whose forehead gleamed a scarlet cross. The American cried out hoarsely. He reached his one good arm to her.

"Madelaine!" he moaned hysterically.

"Yes, laddie," she said soothingly. "I

am here with you. Everything is all right. We found you."

"But you—you!"

"We came through with the hospital train for the Czechs yesterday. We have been a week on the way."

The reaction came in a twinkling.

"Where am I, Madelaine?" he cried, his voice the appeal of a little boy, afraid in the dark.

"You're in Dr. Tolstoi's Red Cross train."

"But we're moving!"

"The train is headed back toward Vladivostok. The line has been mended where the Reds broke through. We have so many wounded we are going back to the hospital on Golden Horn Island. Don't try to talk, laddie. Sleep and I will stay with you."

But Jim Herring, man of the world, yellow journalist, iconoclastic war correspondent, was sobbing.

The girl pressed his good hand tightly as she sat at his side while the train hurtled on eastward. So on and on all the rest of that day they rode and into the sapphire depths of evening with the wonderful blood-red Siberian sunset behind them.

Three times on that journey the man tried to tell the girl his experiences since he had left her in Vladivostok to go far in-country. Each time she bade him lie quiet.

"I understand, laddie," she answered softly. "You need not. Others have told me."

"Others have told you?"

"Captain Graves returned and told us

all about your experience with the dying Japanese and the railroad scandal documents. Billy Evans came out with the account of your work in Baikal Valley. And Captain Smolchak, who cooperated with us yesterday, told us all about the money."

Jim's thoughts were chaotic for the moment. Then he remembered.

"Yes, the money!" he cried. "The money I promised Briggs to deliver in America!"

"We have it. You have done your work well and will be rewarded. Josef, your Czech, is in the car up forward. We found him shot through the legs by one of his own men, trying to get through our lines. But he had the money. He had got it safely out of the Red Guard lines, each bill folded neatly inside each copy of those Bolsheviki propaganda newspapers. And he told us how you refused to desert him the night you were captured. It has all turned out well, and you have made my heart glad. You—have—found—yourself. I knew you would do it!" And the Red Cross nurse's eyes were shining.

"Oh, Madelaine!" he cried mutely. With his one good arm he sought to draw her to him.

"Not now, laddie," she whispered. "The intervention is nearing its close. We will soon be free—for happiness. But the story—would be—oh, so sweet—in the telling!"

The man went to sleep sobbing with the happiness of the boy's heart, which, after all, is the heart of the man-universal.

And the train clicked on through the starlit, snowbound darkness.

SUNRISE

DEEPENING shadows, blackness of the night,

Still, quiet hours; then, suddenly

Faint streaks of gray across the sky,

A gull's wing brushing it; the morning stars

Singing together. A violet ribbon

Tying soft bands of rose; pale-yellow bars.

A moment's hush—deep crooning of the sea—

And then a silken sheet let down from heaven

With burst of riotous color, fold on fold;

Amber and azure, silver, cardinal—

A jeweled canopy, pearl, emerald, sapphire, amethyst.

At last, through arch triumphant blazed with gold,

'Mid blare of noiseless trumpets, rides the sun!

Mary E. Pike.

Everything but the Truth by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Anything but the Truth," "Annexing Bill," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

WILLIAM HERVEY, to be married to Helen Gray the following week, left her to motor up to Blythedale in his new red runabout in order to put the last few finishing touches to the room that was soon to be their bridal chamber in the pretty cottage. Loomis, his book-keeper, reminded him not to fail to be back in town that night by eight, as most important business matters would then claim his attention. At Blythedale he found the house next door occupied by a newly married couple, of whom only the bride, Annabel Elton, was at home. Each was so much in love with love that they could not help but get acquainted, and the Elton car not having yet been delivered, what more natural than for William to offer to take her to Dobson's chicken farm for a dozen fresh eggs, wanted for "Jackie" when he should return from his first absence on the morrow, her Aunt Fannie having promised to come up from the city to spend the night with her. No one, however, seemed to know exactly where Dobson's was, but at last, leaving the car in a shed of the Turnstile Inn, William and Annabel climbed a small mountain to what at last they felt was the right spot, only to find themselves addressed as Mr. and Mrs. Otis, consigned to a private sanatorium for six weeks' treatment under a Dr. Baiswell, who, when William very naturally resisted, ordered him into a strait-jacket, and declared to his man Peter that he must advise the cousin, Marlowe, who had sent the couple, that three months rather than six weeks would be required to cure such an obstinate case.

CHAPTER V.

FORMS OF MADNESS.

EVEN on the high spots, the sun had finished work for that particular day.

Dusk was gathering in the library. The good doctor reached for the wall-switch and turned on the lights on the rusty old chandelier overhead—and William Hervey, incidentally, regained some of his wits.

"Doctor!" he began thickly.

"We failed rather miserably in our efforts at calm discussion, Mr. Otis," the doctor said briefly. "I think that we may eschew further attempts just now."

"But—"

"Number fifteen, Peter—and you, Miss Wray," said the doctor.

"Together?" Peter asked.

The doctor caressed his beard again.

"Yes, I think so," he said meditatively.

"The history of their cases shows no antagonism between them, I believe. Yes, put them in fifteen together."

"What is 'fifteen'?" Annabel cried, hysterically.

"Only a room, and one of the best and most comfortable in the house, my child," the doctor said very quietly—and then grew stern again. "And before you are taken up, young man, and you, too, young woman, I want to say just one thing more to you."

Helplessly, they faced him. The doctor trained a warning forefinger on them.

"Your troubles you have brought solely upon yourselves. High living—fast going—late hours—alcohol—tobacco, and all the

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rest. It is perfectly possible for me to take strenuous measures with both of you. It is my purpose to do nothing of the kind, unless forced to them. Nevertheless," and he paused quite dramatically, "the strenuous measures are all at hand if necessary."

"Oh!" gasped Annabel.

"Your powers of judgment have not been altogether shattered. Hence, I leave the future in your own hands, as regards treatment. A little self-control and tractability, and I shall use the most gentle measures. A little violence on your part and—" He spread his hands before him, by way of indicating what might be expected. William drew one deep breath.

"And when our friends find us, doc, and we get out of this, let me say that the things that 'll happen to *you* will—"

"Suppose we leave that topic also for future discussion?" smiled the alienist, and returned to his desk. "Fifteen!"

"I'll take off the jacket up there, doctor?" Peter inquired.

"Eh? Oh, yes," the doctor said absently.

The nurse was walking Annabel, limp and white, ahead of her. Peter whirled Bill Hervey around and marched him after, a poor chunk of humanity with a brain temporarily almost as helpless as the arms in the canvas! By no possibility could this thing really be happening—and still they were walking right along, just as if it were solid fact.

There were the broad, dusky stairs, with Miss Wray pausing to turn on one forlorn little light and then urging Annabel upward. Yes, and William's feet were upon them now, and he, too, was ascending; and now all four of them stood in the upper corridor and another little light snapped into being, to accentuate the vastness of the place.

"Fifteen?" Peter queried.

"The corner one, straight ahead," Miss Wray snapped and led the way.

The door swung open, showing only blackness beyond. There was a key in the inner side, too, and Miss Wray removed it to the outer side, thereafter shoving Annabel into the gloom. A pause, and further lights appeared within and William, having been prodded into motion again by the stony Peter, was also in number fifteen.

He looked around dazedly, as Peter worked over the fastening of his jacket. This mighty apartment might have been designed by the king of the giants for his own bedchamber; or perhaps the builder of the place had planned it for visiting royalty, since such rooms always seem to run to size.

Half a mile or so over there stood a four-poster; about the same distance in the other direction, the open door revealed Miss Wray switching on further lights in a spacious bath-room; again about the same distance overhead appeared a ceiling ornate with fresco work. Oh, it was a fine old place for anybody whose tastes ran to space; but William Hervey, free at last, failed to find a single thrill of appreciation within him.

"You needn't stick out your jaw at me like that, Peter," he said rather weakly. "I'm not going to start anything."

"You'd best not," Peter said briefly. "The bell's over there. Ring if you want anything, sir, and please don't ring unnecessary. We're short of help here, and I'm too busy to do much running. Dinner 'll be sent up to 'em, I take it?" he inquired of the nurse.

"Certainly," Miss Wray responded.

She had deposited Mrs. Elton in an elderly tapestry armchair; she seemed unaware of that young person's faint, scared whimpering, as she cast a capable eye about the room. She nodded and motioned Peter toward the door—and when he had stepped out she followed without a single comment, and they heard the key snap outside.

And they were prisoners!

Now the nice thing, the obviously proper thing, of course, would have been for William to break into violent self-determination, small though his responsibility for the insane situation, and for Annabel to protest with equal violence that the blame was all her own. Yet, while neither was of an inordinately selfish nature, it is the fact that when William had dropped limply into a chair of his own, they merely sat and stared at one another for a solid minute, each thinking fiery, self-centered thoughts.

His business! The Hervey Manufacturing Company! William's teeth ground

and his brain reeled. Loomis had been right; Helen had been right. He himself was a blithering idiot, an ass unmitigated, a clod whose few wits had dissolved in a ray of June sunshine and—

"What does it *mean*?" wailed dizzily at him from across the room.

"Mean?" William exploded amazingly. "*Mean*? It means ruin for me!"

"W-what?"

"Yes, ruin! Ruin! I've got six hours' work to do in New York, and the whole fate of my firm depends on it. And I'm locked up here! I'm locked up in this da—"

He broke the word off just in time. Wildly, he clenched his hands and shook them toward the ceiling.

"That's what it means!" he repeated. "It means that I'm wrecked if that job isn't done—and there's no way of doing it now. It means that those everlastingly accursed eggs have put the kibosh on as nice a little business as a man ever owned. *That's* what it means!"

"Yes, and—and how about *me*?" Mrs. Elton demanded with soaring heat.

"They were your eggs," William snapped unpleasantly.

"But it wasn't my stupidity that got us in here," the young woman retorted with equal vigor.

"Hey?"

"No! I never wanted to come into this place! I knew it was no chicken farm! But you'd been so nice about trying to find them that I didn't want to argue." She faced him, eyes flaming. "*What* am I going to do about Aunt Fannie?"

"Pah!" grunted William.

"It's not unimportant, if that's what you mean," cried Mrs. Elton. "It—I wouldn't offend her for worlds. No, I'm not mercenary, and it isn't just because she's so rich. But my Jackie isn't very well established yet, and he depends so much on her good will—" Lips quivering, Mrs. Elton panted to a standstill, but the eyes flashed at William, and her trembling hands shut tight. "Oh, I wish I'd never laid eyes on you! I wish I'd never laid eyes on you!"

"Yes, and believe me when I tell you that I wish I'd never—"

Here, since there was some smoldering manhood within him, William caught himself very sharply. It may even be said that, soundlessly, he cursed himself for a cad, a coward and several new and luridly qualified kinds of fool. A slightly unusual situation had enmeshed them, to be sure; but the world was not necessarily coming to an end and the situation itself would not improve one whit through hysterical anger on his part.

Little Mrs. Elton had collapsed in her chair again and covered her face. Also, she was crying once more. Ten steps took William to her side.

"I beg your pardon, from the bottom of my heart," he said humbly. "I'm a born idiot, but I didn't mean to be a beast."

"You—you were right," Annabel sobbed pitifully. "It's my fault. I didn't mean to be a beast, either."

"It's not your fault at all," William said quietly. "The blame is all mine, and the Lord knows how you'll ever forgive me. Don't cry."

He patted her round shoulder soothingly. The touch seemed to comfort her; ever so slightly and blamelessly, Mrs. Elton snuggled against the hand and her sobbing died down. William sighed inaudibly; really, she was not much more than a badly frightened child.

"We'll have to stop abusing one another and face the thing calmly, you know," he laughed, with an attempt at bright good cheer.

"No, we—we won't abuse each other any more, will we?" Annabel sniffed.

"Most certainly not," William said heartily. "Now, let's see. We're the victims of some crazy misunderstanding. How it happened, I don't know. It did happen. We're here and—"

"Yes, but they can't lock people up like this!" Annabel protested warmly. "Can they?"

"They certainly cannot, even if they do seem to have done it. However, that's another point for future consideration. We're here. We want to get out. All we have to do is to find the means."

Annabel nodded brightly. It was really simple when one put it that way.

"We could bribe that man!"

"Have you any money to bribe him with?" William asked dismally.

"There is twenty dollars in my coat-pocket, but that's down in the car."

"Yes, and there's a respectable pile in my bank, but that's down in the city," William sighed. "I have a bad habit of carrying mighty little cash. I haven't more than ten dollars on me, and Peter doesn't look like a ten-dollar man." He scowled. "I wonder how far it is to the ground?"

He hurried to the window at the far side, opened it and peered out for half a minute. He found little Mrs. Elton on her feet, all expectancy, when he turned.

"We can jump?" she cried.

"We could jump off the Woolworth Building, if we happened to be on the roof," William said grimly. "What would happen to us when we landed is another question. This must be the tallest house in the world. It's about a mile down to the ground."

"Oh!" said Annabel disappointedly. "Well, we—we could send for the doctor and reason with him?"

William shook his weary head.

"We may have to try that later. I'm afraid it's not much use. He seems pretty certain that we're people named Otis and—well, let's sit down and rack our brains for a while."

They were still in the process of racking when dinner appeared on a tray, borne by the massive Peter.

No meal could have been much more vile. The very soul of the tin-can lurked in that soup. Tin was upon the breath of the indescribable, minced corned-beef; even the soggy potatoes suggested that they might have made recent escape from some air-tight container. William, having sampled the soup, addressed Peter. "This is meant for human consumption?"

"I eat it!"

"That doesn't answer my question, you know," William said gently. "Is this stuff meant for food?"

"You'll have some trouble getting better while you're here."

William sighed.

"If they're not crazy when you get 'em, you drive 'em mad with hunger, eh?"

"You're quite a bright young guy," Peter observed. "Eat!"

"You needn't stay around, you know."

"I got orders always to stick when they send up knives and forks," said the attendant, and, drawing his chair another cautious two yards nearer the feast, sat alert and ready for trouble.

They were young. They were superbly healthy. They had passed some hours in the open air. Hence, William and Annabel sought to still the pangs of hunger with the curious materials before them—sought, but only for a little while. Even the younger stomach has its limitations. William sat back.

"I never understood before to-night how food could start mutinies on ships," he murmured. "I think you may take the rest of it out and bury it, Peter."

Without comment, the attendant lifted the tray.

"You wouldn't accept a ten-dollar bill and permit us to escape, Peter?" William asked drearily.

"From what I understand about the length of time your relatives want you kept here, and the amount of money they got, I wouldn't take a thousand to let you go down in the office," Peter stated, quite flatly. "Now, listen, and take a tip from a friend."

"Eh?"

"Turn out your light and hop into bed and stay there, both of you. What you need's sleep more than anything else, and the doc 'll see you get it here—natural or otherwise. And he's no boy to fool with!"

Then he stalked out, locking the door carefully after him and apparently dropping a cup or two from the tray in the process; and they were permitted to gaze at each other with whatever amusement they could muster. William spent very little time in smiling, though; close to Annabel again, he spoke swiftly:

"This isn't any place to be. We'll have to quit theorizing and get out. Let's turn out the lights."

"But—"

"You don't want to be jabbed full of holes with a hypodermic, do you? No, neither do I," William went on, almost

fiercely, as he found the switch and punched it.

Gloom that was no less than awful descended upon the room; Annabel Elton, with a little stumbling rush, was at William's side and holding fast to his arm.

"I'm so frightened! I—"

"You poor kid, I know all about it," William whispered, and slipped about her a protecting arm that met with no repulse. "I hate like sin to scare you, but we've got to leave. Now, be a regular, brave little girl and give me a hand, and to-morrow we'll laugh about it."

"All right," Annabel whispered tremulously.

"The sheets—and there's a spare double blanket on the foot of that bed," whispered William swiftly. "I'm going to make a rope. You help me pull the knots."

Ah, yes, and she was rising to the occasion. Some relief came to William as she hurried with him to the bed and helped him pull off sheets. Deftly enough, there in the terrific darkness, they rolled the sheets into ropelike lengths; securely enough they knotted them together and then stretched out the long blanket and added it to the rope.

Finished, the thing seemed really of tremendous length. It coiled about William's feet, even as it threatened to overturn chairs across the room, when he started for the open window. He fumbled his way about the massive steam radiator that stood near; he found the right spot and anchored his rope. And then very gleefully he whispered:

"I'll go down first and make sure that it's strong enough and long enough. Shall I come up for you or can you get down alone?"

"I can get down alone, I think."

"Without hurting yourself?"

"Yes."

"Good for you!" breathed William Hervey, as he swung a leg over the sill.

Even though his uppercut had missed fire, he was something of an athlete. Going down a thick, soft rope was no job at all. William chuckled silently as his fingers closed—opened—closed again—opened again, each time letting him that much nearer the sane, safe outer earth.

Although, had somebody removed the ground altogether? He seemed to have descended yards upon yards and still his feet touched nothing. He paused and sought to look down, through the black night. He—*ah!* He was sitting on the ground now, was he not? Ten thousand stars were glittering before his dumfounded eyes and leagues of improvised rope were coming down upon his head.

Somewhere up there the wretched thing had parted.

"Oh! Oh! You're *killed!*" came agonizedly and far too loudly from above.

"Hush! Wait!" William hissed. "Hush!"

Cold perspiration stood out upon his forehead. Had he—had he managed to smash himself anywhere? Not without a stifled, pained grunt or two, William rose cautiously to his feet. His legs were all right; yes, and his arms were all right, he discovered, and breathed a prayer of thanks. Nor, for that matter, had he broken his back in the fall—and, what was of at least as much importance, the thud of his landing had not aroused the house.

William breathed deeply and looked around. Decidedly he had added another touch to the situation; Annabel was all alone up there now. It might be possible to throw back the rope and let her make a start of her own; it was more likely that, having accomplished an insecure knot, she would contrive a fall less happy than William's.

No, he would have to devise some other means of getting her out, which raised the mildly interesting question: what other means? William Hervey squinted on through the gloom, to which his eyes were growing somewhat accustomed.

There was a big barn right over there. Perhaps in former years it had been a hay-barn. Perhaps there were ladders. Perhaps—nay, there must be ladders. Who ever saw a barn of that size without ladders?

Cheered, suddenly and with whatever warrant, William stepped away on his jarred legs; stumbled, caught his breath, stopped short and listened for thirty seconds, stepped on again. And here was the barn, and now where was the door? Wil-

liam fumbled along the side and all but toppled over again. His foot had caught in something that time. He stooped and felt about and a thrill went through him; here, even without the trouble of entering the structure, was a ladder!

Aye, and it seemed to be as long as the barn itself. He felt along and felt along the thing, lying there upon the ground and resting against the barn's side. He chuckled richly. The center would be about here. He lifted cautiously and poised the length of timber. He had found the center fast enough.

And now there was nothing at all to do but slip back, erect his ladder, rescue the beautiful little lady, and flee! Though his back was breaking under the strain of the thing, William hurried onward—hurried safely, too, although there were trees to hit and bushes over which to fall. Men have been decorated with war crosses for less nervous expenditure than William made upon that little hair-raising journey.

Yet he had accomplished it safely. Up there, a slightly lighter dot on the black side of the house, Annabel was leaning out of the window, breathing audibly. William stood back, and, his whole strength in the task, erected his ladder with never a single scrape.

Up it, too, he ran noiselessly. Joyfully he gripped the cold hands of little Mrs. Elton.

"We're all right!" he hissed quite madly. "We're safe! Did you ever see luck to beat that, kid?"

"You're not hurt?"

"Not a bit. Never mind that part. Come along! I'll start down first; you follow instantly. I want to be there to steady you on the down trip. Come!"

He fumbled outward for the ladder, which stood six inches above the sill. He gripped at the side, chuckling insanely. He—well, he sagged forward and recovered himself with a gasp. The ladder had moved outward under his very fingers. He reached after it, choking wonderingly. Again his finger-tips touched the wood—again the thing slipped farther into the night, away, away!

And then, with a mighty crash and a

crackling of small branches, inconsiderate hands sent the precious ladder headlong into the bushes, and Dr. Baiswell's clear, cool voice floated up:

"Get back from that window, Mr. and Mrs. Otis. Close it. I shall be up to attend to your cases immediately."

CHAPTER VI.

HOPE DEPARTS.

TEN terrible seconds passed.

"We—we—we might just as well turn on the light," Mrs. Elton quavered.

"Yes, we—we might!" William agreed, and stumbled across the room.

The switch snapped. Once more the vast chamber was brilliant; but such color as either of them had enjoyed during its last brilliant spell was quite gone now. Annabel's cheeks were snow white; it cannot be said that anything like an apoplectic flush was upon the cheek of William.

"I guess we're up against it now!" he said thinly.

"What will he do?"

"That's what we're going to find out," muttered William, and regained some of his composure. "He can't—"

"He can drug us!" Annabel submitted wildly, although with sound sense. "He has his attendants, and he can have us held down while he drugs us and keeps us here for—*forever!*"

Her hands stretched out pitifully. William caught them in a commendably firm grip.

"Nothing like that will happen," he assured her, although there was small conviction in his voice. "You're right, though. He has the better of us on the force proposition. We'll have to be diplomatic and—psst! Here he comes!"

It was really wonderful, that smile of William's! It was submissive to the extent of admitting complete defeat; it was frankly rueful and slightly humorous in its confession of that defeat; and at the same time there was a sufficiently jaunty quality to excite admiration.

Nor was this artful expression wasted. Even as, entering, he met it, Dr. Baiswell's

own expression underwent a change. He had been visibly angry when that door swung open; now, after a moment, he himself smiled, grimly and rather cynically.

"I got you that time, Mr. Otis," he stated.

"That's my idea of the perfectly superfluous remark, doc," sighed William.

"Doubtless. Why did you try it?"

William stretched comfortably.

"There was something about the corned-beef hash we couldn't appreciate," he said. "We were considering a change of boarding-places."

This time, however briefly, the doctor laughed outright.

"You're not altogether to blame, so far as that goes," he remarked. "We're having a little temporary trouble in the kitchen and matters will improve, as you will discover, in a very few days. However, I didn't come up here for light conversation, Mr. Otis."

"I am good at almost any kind," William remarked suavely.

"That I believe," said the alienist. But his smile was altogether gone now; with a chill William observed that a decidedly harsh, professional expression had taken its place. "I shall be quite frank with you, Mr. Otis. My purpose in coming here was to administer a sedative to both of you."

"It isn't necessary. We're sleepy now."

"There was no marked drowsiness in the way you reached for that ladder."

"Maybe not, but we're sleepy now," William insisted. "Be a sport, doctor. We're not in any need of dope. You win, we're licked."

"I wonder if you quite realize that?" the doctor mused.

"We do," said William, and studied him.

He was perfectly calm. He was highly intelligent. Yes, he was a reasoning human being; he could hear and understand cold reason when delivered by a good talker like William Hervey, who was no longer in a state of high excitement.

"Listen to me a minute, doc," he said suddenly.

"Well?"

"You have this whole thing wrong. You wouldn't listen a while ago, when we were

all worked up, but you will now. We're not Mr. and Mrs. Otis!"

"Ah! And you are—"

"My name's Hervey. Go down-stairs and look in your telephone-book for the Hervey Manufacturing Company. Then ask central for information and she'll give you the number of my plant over in Jersey, if you haven't a Jersey directory. Call them up and ask for Dolan, the night watchman in the office end, and have him give you a description of me. Then call up Castle Hall, in New York, ask the night clerk if I'm there, and, when he says I'm not, ask *him* what I look like. Then call up Mr. Boulton Gray's home in New York. Ask for him and ask *him* what I look like. After that, if you're not convinced, I've got papers here in my pocket that would prove to a blind Congo native that I'm a certain William Hervey, and that I'm not Otis. After you've looked at *them*—"

In the strangest way, William's voice trailed off. This was not because he felt his case weakening. It was because the doctor, who had grown thoughtful, had brought out a little black-leather box and opened it. Meditatively, he gazed at its contents. Two nickel hypodermic syringes glittered in there and, in a rack on the cover, six or eight very slender vials of little white pellets.

"I am inclined—yes, I am very strongly inclined to regard this persistent denial of identity as one of the most unfortunate phases of your case," he muttered, speaking to the hypodermic outfit rather than to William. "Um—ah—yes. Possibly the forerunner of acute—um."

He tapped the nearer syringe with his excellent finger-nails. His eyes narrowed, and he studied William Hervey. And, as his spine grew cold, William's diplomacy changed its course with the speed of lightning.

"Er—doc, it's no use, is it?" he asked, somewhat huskily.

"What is no use, Mr. Otis?"

"This stunt of trying to fool you? There's nothing to it—hey, doc?" Bill Hervey pursued, with almost ghastly merriment. "All right, I'll quit right here. I'll own up. I'm Otis."

"Yes, I know that," smiled the doctor. "What puzzles me—"

"About whether I really thought I was somebody else? Well, I didn't. Not in a million years," William laughed bitterly. "That was just a try at getting out. We're not strong for the country; we wanted to get back to the bright lights and whoop her up."

He breathed again, too. He seemed to have hit the right line, for the doctor, after a last moment of hesitation, snapped his case together, and replaced it in his pocket.

"You seem at least to have attained a more amenable frame of mind," the doctor smiled cynically. "The bright lights will do without you for many weeks. Do you quite understand that, Mr. Otis?"

"Too well, doc!" William said cheerlessly.

"Very well, then. Now hear the rest of what I have to say. As I mentioned downstairs, I desire—I plan—to use the mildest measures in cases like your own and that of Mrs. Otis. On the other hand, as I also mentioned, there are many other measures. So far as possible, I wish to leave your lives normal; that is why I permit you to remain together. You understand?"

"Yes."

"But at the very next outbreak—at the very first suggestion of another attempt at escape—I shall see that each of you goes into indefinite solitary confinement!"

"No!" escaped Annabel.

"Not unless you render it imperative," the doctor said with growing suavity, and he rose and considered them carefully. "If that becomes necessary, I shall go further, I think, and try the effect of surgical interference with your malady. In your case, at any rate, Mrs. Otis."

"My—my case?" Annabel gasped.

"There are two peculiar malformations of your skull, madam, which present interesting possibilities. The knife, as I have found—ah, well, we'll permit that to rest for the present."

He bowed in the most conventional manner and stepped out. As usual, the lock scraped noisily. Then his steps died away in the corridor and a pale-green Annabel was gripping William Hervey.

"Don't make a noise. Please don't make a noise," she gasped. "Please don't do anything to make him think we're trying to get out."

"I'm not. I—"

"Because if you do he'll take me off somewhere and cut my head off," little Mrs. Elton choked. "That's what he said! *That's what he said!* He said he'd take the knife and cut my head—"

"Hush!" breathed William savagely, and although she was another man's wife he took her very firmly in his arms and held her there. "Hush! He'll do nothing of the kind. Do you hear? There, there! Do you see that chair over there with the loose leg? Well, I'll wrench that off in a minute for a club, and before he ever lays a finger on you he'll have to kill me first."

He held her more tightly and patted her until the spasm of terror had passed. He gritted his teeth and looked around over her head, too, with some suspicion that he was really going mad. And then, with much relief, he found that Mrs. Elton had taken a grip on herself, even to the extent of pulling away from him gently.

Although her bosom heaved tumultuously still, some of her color was coming back; and with a sigh William released her.

"Don't fret about the man," he said quietly. "I promise you that—"

"I—I wasn't fretting about him. I was thinking of something else."

"What?"

"We're here, you and—and I," Mrs. Elton faltered, and her color rose quite astonishingly. "We're here for weeks."

"There'll be a way of getting out. Our friends are bound to come hunting for us, and they'll find us."

"Yes, Jackie 'll find us," Annabel cried. "We're locked up here together, and Jackie 'll find us."

"It's reasonably blameless, you know," William said grimly.

"Yes, but Jackie 'll never understand that."

"Well, if Jackie isn't a congenital idiot—"

"Jackie's no idiot at all. He's a—*a man!* And he's jealous of me, and when he finds out about—about this he'll never

wait to ask questions. He'll—he'll shoot us both!"

"Well, so far as I'm concerned, he's entirely welcome," William sighed. "Life isn't going to mean much to me, this time to-morrow."

"But I—"

"Hold on, child, and listen to me," Bill Hervey said firmly. "Nobody's going to do any shooting and nobody's going to cut off any heads. That's rot—all of it. We're in a mess, and there's apparently no way of getting out of it to-night. We're here, and we'll have to stay here and make the best of it: I want you to lie down."

"I can't!"

"Yes, you can, and I'll cover you up with that other blanket and sit beside you," William said very gently. "Come along, little girl."

Quivering, Mrs. Elton seemed to search his very soul.

"You won't try anything else that might—might start trouble? You won't do anything that might leave me—me alone here?"

"I swear it!" William said. "Yes, really. On my word of honor!"

And, now, tired, stressed to the breaking-point, the poor, lovely little creature was permitting herself to be led to the mighty four-poster. With a shudder, she settled down, and William covered her with the blanket.

"I can't—*sleep!*" she said indignantly.

"Nevertheless, I think you'd better just lie still and keep quiet."

Many minutes passed along. Spasmodic tears came to Mrs. Elton, and, after a little, passed again. Long, shaky sighs followed. She stirred fretfully.

"That old bracelet cuts my wrist!" she complained, and tugged at it with the other hand.

It came free and she tossed it to the bed—a huge, antique affair which William had noted and about which, in a calmer past, he had meant to ask.

"I'll put it in my pocket," he suggested softly.

"Will you take this cameo pin, too?" asked Mrs. Elton, detaching it. "It digs into me every time I get comfortable."

"Let's have it."

"And do be careful of it. That's a gift from Aunt Fannie and she prized it all her life."

Wisely, conversation was permitted to expire once more. William sat back and, leaning against the post, sighed drearily. She would not sleep, of course, but at least she was comfortable and more calm.

He looked at her after an interval. Her lovely eyes had closed. Much as one might caress a kitten, William took to stroking the yellow hair. There was a momentary startled stare up at him. William smiled absently; and the smile carried reassurance, for the eyes closed again and that last sigh was almost contented.

On stroked Bill Hervey and on. Indeed, after a time, he was doing it quite unconsciously—and after another time he came to himself and looked down. Annabel's whole expression had relaxed now.

"Not asleep?" William queried, softly and amazedly.

There was no reply. He bent a little nearer; soft, regular breathing came from beneath the blanket. Very cautiously, William rose and gazed down, shaking his head.

"Poor little kid! Poor innocent little kid! One of the kind that had been sheltered and petted all her life, guileless and honest as a week-old babe—and now in a mess like this!" William's teeth ground, not altogether over his own troubles, and he settled in one of the big chairs, wrapping his ulster around him and stretching his legs.

With one eye on the door, he could think of his own case now. Indeed, he could think of nothing else.

What was to be the end of all this? He didn't know. In the course of time, people would begin to look for him. The deserted red roadster alone would cause comment and a hunt for its owner. So far as that went, since there seemed to be a real Mr. and Mrs. Otis, they might be expected to turn up at any time and clear the whole situation.

Marlowe was a puzzle, though. He—oh, Marlowe didn't matter! The future didn't matter. The thing that mattered was *to-night!*

William Hervey, with a perfectly inno-

cent young bride, was locked up here. That in itself was bad enough for all hands. And meanwhile, William Hervey's lovely little manufacturing business was picking at the coverlets, with the final gasp due before noon to-morrow. That, too, was rather bad. And Helen and all that she meant?

He had promised to telephone Helen to-night. He had not done so. He had promised to telephone her again in the morning. He would not be able to do so, unless something unforeseen happened between now and morning.

And if Jackie were accounted a jealous person, what of Helen Gray? What earthly flow of eloquence would ever convince Helen Gray of this night's impeccability? William was unable to say. And it might not matter so very much.

His head sank gloomily. With the business dead and buried, as bade fair indeed to be ice-cold facts if to-morrow's contracts were not closed, he could not well marry. Nor could he ask Helen to wait, even were she willing to wait, while he founded another business. William's head sank still lower. Verily, he had overtaken something when he started on the hunt for Mrs. Elton's eggs!

The night was wearing on. He glanced at his watch, after one peculiar upward jerk of the head, and discovered that, in some unexplained fashion, midnight had come and gone this fifteen minutes. Not that he had slept; he had no intention of anything of that kind, with responsibility for Annabel's welfare on his shoulders, but William stretched his legs again and sighed himself down to a still more comfortable huddle.

Over on the bed, Annabel stirred. William sought to turn and look and found that, since she had settled down again, it was really unnecessary effort. He closed his eyes; that can do no harm when one has determined not to sleep. More, he kept them closed; it may even be said that he drowsed, although certain it is that for the next hour or two, every creak of a twig outdoors brought him up with eyes wide open, tense and staring about.

But nothing happened and, slowly, William's nervous tension slackened markedly.

He yawned several times. He was infernally sleepy. He wondered—well, what was that? William sat up again and, in the strangest way, the faintest gray suggestion of light had come to the sky without.

He blinked around. It seemed to William that people had been talking—many people, not in this room, but at a considerable distance. It seemed to him that he had been listening to them, without being able to drag himself quite out of slumberland.

Although, at the end of two listening minutes, he concluded that it must have been a dream. He frowned; sleep was heavy upon him. He rose and switched off the lights and the gray in the sky lightened astonishingly. It was dawn and Annabel Elton still slept. William, stiff and lethargic, shuffled back to his chair. He would have to begin some real thinking now.

For a beginning—well, one might as well think comfortably. William drew up another big chair and disposed his legs upon it. He yawned again. He wished that he had had sense enough to try that trick before. Once more he yawned. Then he settled to deep and careful thought and—

There came another start. William sat bolt upright and gazed in astonishment. That momentary impression, that some one had turned a searchlight on the window, was all wrong. That was sunshine! He jerked out his watch; then he rose quite hurriedly, for it was past eight o'clock!

Annabel was moving, too. She muttered; she turned over; she yawned—a little, comfortable yawn that brought a smile to William. It seemed to break in two, though, as her eyes opened. With a bound, Annabel was sitting bolt upright, winking fast, a lovely tousled little creature.

"Did I sleep all night?" she demanded.

"You didn't move twice!" said William, quite as if he had been counting.

"I—what has happened?"

"Nothing. I think the household's still asleep," the guardian went on quietly. "I've got a comb in this pocket and there's plenty of cold water in there. We might as well freshen up."

Mrs. Elton nodded soberly; realization was fast returning.

"Jackie—" she began fearfully.

"Let's hope he turns up here soon!" William said grimly, and made for the bathroom.

He was a brighter, fresher being after a little cold splashing of his weary head in the huge old basin. Mrs. Elton improved considerably, too, in the next ten minutes. Then:

"Isn't it *awfully* still?" she queried.

"It certainly is almighty quiet for a lunatic asylum," William confessed. "They must have a very well-behaved lot of patients. There wasn't one howl all night or—"

He moved over to the door and listened. The grave could have been no stiller than the spaces beyond. He leaned upon the knob. It turned and—the door swung creaking inward.

"Why, this thing's open!" he gasped.

"Dare we make a break?" cried Mrs. Elton, and came back to life with one giant throb.

"Dare we?" hissed William, and grabbed his ulster with one hand and Annabel with the other. "Come on!"

Side by side, they tiptoed out. No voice came to command a halt. Side by side, they sped down the stairs and across the lower corridor. Panting; William tugged at the spring latch of the outer door and dragged. That door, too, came open. The free sunshine lay beyond.

And, with an almost deafening crash, the door swung fully back and struck the towering old hat-rack. As one, William and Annabel bounded to the soft turf. As one, they stopped a dozen yards away and looked backward, for all the world like a pair of hunted animals.

Yet though the crash of that door might well have waked the dead, no steps were pounding through the house in pursuit of them. A tense half-minute passed. Much less tensely, it grew to a full minute. A little bird, chirping overhead, furnished the loudest sound in that immediate locality.

"Say! That's queer!" William breathed.

"Well, don't go back. Don't—"

William grinned suddenly at her, the first real grin of several hours.

"I've got to take just one peep. You

keep on walking slowly and be ready to run. Don't worry about me. I can get away."

Sheer curiosity had the better of him. Lightly, he stepped back to the fateful house, listened, hesitated and then stepped into it.

"Doc!" called William, rather daringly.

Seconds dragged by, but no answer came.

"Hey! Doc!" William shouted at the top of his lungs.

Still there was no answer.

CHAPTER VII.

DID IT HAPPEN?

ONE more minute, William stood quite still. Up-stairs, a lone rat scurried through the walls. That was all.

Over that way, unless certain rather vile odors last night had been misleading, must lie the kitchen—down that corridor, William surmised. Investigating it just now might be the most absurd and foolhardy thing in the world, but he was beyond resisting the temptation. That kitchen, as the heart of the household, should have been pulsing audibly at this moment. It was not.

Cautiously enough, he made his way down the corridor and opened the door an inch or two and then, after the first wary glance, a foot or more.

The kitchen it surely was, but a kitchen without a cook. The one dingy window was closed and locked; the big range as cold as any ice. Black, dry, and empty was the iron sink, and over there the empty pots hung in a dusty double row. No suggestion of coffee lingered on the air, no steam simmered from the chilly tea-kettle.

Indeed, the place might not have been used for years; and having absorbed all these details with eyes that bulged slightly, William sped back to the door.

"Oohoo!" he called, to the shrinking Mrs. Elton, some fifty yards away. "Come back. *They're all gone!*"

"They're what?"

"Gone!" repeated William, as she approached fearfully. "It's darned near incredible, of course, but there seems to be

nobody around this morning. I'm going to look about in there for a minute, but you needn't come."

Mrs. Elton shuddered.

"I don't want to be left alone," she murmured dubiously, and stepped in with him.

With freedom granted so unexpectedly, of course, matters of gravest concern were calling to William, many miles from there. Yet with last night's office work all untouched, the worst was fairly certain to happen in any case and ten minutes one way or the other could not make much difference to the Hervey Manufacturing Company.

Nay, the utter strangeness of the whole affair was growing upon William so markedly that, for a little, he quite forgot the company in his eagerness to find the answer! Not that he might not find the answer all too suddenly, should one of these doors open and another strait-jacket appear—yet some odd and unsubstantiated little instinct assured William that the risk was very small. Quite boldly, he opened the door of Dr. Baiswell's vast and gloomy office.

It was empty. The shades were drawn down uniformly. The dust of past ages floated upon the air. Over the desk was spread an unlovely stretch of grimy crash; on the big chairs dingy slip-covers had appeared; even the waste-basket, which last night had been half-filled with torn papers, was entirely empty now. William looked blankly at his fellow sufferer.

"Can—can you beat that?" he gasped.

"It—it can't be so!" Mrs. Elton faltered, somewhat illogically. "I mean, a doctor couldn't leave his—his lunatic asylum like that! All the other patients—"

"That's right, too! What about the other patients?" cried William. "Maybe he left their doors unlocked, too, while they were asleep! Maybe they all escaped before we woke up!"

"Maybe *everybody's* gone!"

"We're in a risky place if they're not!" grinned William.

"Oh, but I hope they're not! I hope that woman nurse is here or—"

"What?"

"Well, of course I do!" Mrs. Elton cried, and reddened. "Don't you understand? I've been—been gone all night and I want somebody who can tell Jackie that I—"

"Yes, I understand," William said hastily, and the new angle sent a small chill through him. "She's around, of course. We'll find her and make sure of where we can reach her later on."

"Yes, if she doesn't lock us up again when she sees us!"

William pursed his lips pensively and nodded.

"I don't think they care about locking us up this morning, somehow. Last night we couldn't breathe without bringing a crowd. This morning they'll let us knock down the house without even coming to look and—well, let's go on investigating, anyway. The door's always wide open behind us and we're young and active."

He led the way across the foyer, to open a drawing-room door. His eyebrows went up. *This* room, at least, had not been opened in many months; very visible dust was thick everywhere. Possibly the patients did little entertaining. He shook his head and tried another, which chanced to be the entrance to the dining-room—and once more they found shades drawn well down, chairs long neglected ranged soberly around the wall, a dingy film on the glass doors of the two closets!

"I don't believe a meal's been eaten in there in ten years!" he muttered.

Behind them lay the stairway, wide and dark and silent. Together and briskly, because curiosity was livening in Mrs. Elton as well, they mounted again to the upper floor. They listened intently—to nothing at all.

"You stay right here, where getting away is easier," advised William Hervey. "I'm going to talk it over with some of the other victims."

Boldly, he opened a bedroom door and stepped inside; he emerged and opened the next, repeating the performance. Nine times, indeed, did William open doors up there, enter, pause and again emerge. Then he was beside Annabel again with:

"I'll bet my last dollar that not one of those beds has been occupied in over a

year—and I've been in the last room in the place!"

"But with patients—"

"There never were any patients!" William said flatly. "Some of those beds are without mattresses, and dust an inch thick on the springs. Some of them are made up, with the sheets all yellow—like those in our suite—and dust on *them*, too! It sounds crazy enough, but it's fact; *nobody has lived here for months!*"

The plain mystery of the thing should have appealed to Annabel; what she said, however, was:

"That woman isn't here, either!"

"Nobody's here at all! Nobody seems to have been here!" William laughed, rather insanely. "Were we—were *we* here?"

He moved slowly to the door of the room Dr. Baiswell had dubbed "fifteen," and then strolled in, to reappear a moment later with each hand occupied.

"We were here," he announced. "Here's your hat and mine. We may as well put them on and get back to conventional things."

He led the way down-stairs and to the sunshine once more. No powerful attendant, no adamant doctor appeared to interpose one word of protest! They were gone—that was all! They had turned into thin air, just as a presumably bustling insane asylum of last night had turned into a dusty, deserted old house this morning.

Later on, doubtless, they would learn the answer—if an answer existed this side of purely occult fields. For the present, the Hervey Manufacturing Company was beginning to materialize again in its owner's brain. He would have to hustle to deliver Mrs. Elton at her home just as swiftly as might be; he would have to breeze in and try bluffing his way through the matters of the morning. And bluffing with those particular people offered a forlorn hope, as William knew. He drew the door after him and listened to the click of the spring latch.

"Now, we'll race back just as fast as—" he began. And he paused, to stare through the grove and mutter. "Eh? Who's the gentleman?"

"It isn't that doctor?" Mrs. Elton gasped, and clutched him.

"No, it's just a plain, ordinary man this time," William muttered. "Er—come along. Let me do the talking, if he speaks."

Very evidently, he intended to speak. He sauntered directly toward William and Annabel—a good-natured, plainly dressed man, with two or three keys in one hand and a tag attached to them. He bowed.

"Looking around?" he queried genially.

"Er—um—yes. Looking around," William agreed cautiously.

"Not thinking of renting the house?" said the other, and his smile broadened encouragingly.

"Do you own it?"

"Eh? Own it? No. It belongs to the Simon Graves estate. I'm Barker, the real estate man in Heathervale. I just drop over here once a month to make sure the old place is still standing."

"Well, just what is the old place?" William inquired, even more cautiously than before.

"Why, it's the house old Simon Graves—you've heard of him? Lithographer? Millionaire? It's the place he built after he retired. He lived up here till he died, two years ago, and then his eldest son tried it for a while. Just himself and wife and a couple of servants and it was too big for 'em, I believe," the agent rambled on, squinting through the trees at the supposed sanatorium. "I've been trying to rent it for him ever since, but it's no go. Too big!"

A queer chilliness crept over William Hervey.

"It hasn't been occupied at all?"

"Nope."

"It wasn't occupied yesterday?"

The agent stared at him for an instant, finding the tone odd.

"It was for about ten minutes yesterday afternoon," he said. "I went up there to tinker the hinges on the front door—they've been loose for months—and I left my screw-driver behind. That's what I'm going back for now." He beamed professionally upon them. "Step in and look around? It may be just what you're after in the way of a house."

"I'm sure it isn't!" William said swiftly,

although with a gulp. "We're ever so much obliged, but we're in a hurry now. Er—good-by!"

He took Mrs. Elton's limp arm and marched her straight down the hill. Just once he glanced back. The agent, with obvious difficulty, was fitting the key to the lock—the tagged key from his real estate office—doubtless the only existing key for that door! William's smile was ghastly; he did not turn it upon Annabel as he said thickly:

"Er—we—we *were* there last night, weren't we?"

"I was just going to ask you the same thing!" Annabel faltered.

"Then I guess we were, all right enough! But nobody else was there!"

"There aren't any ghosts!" Mrs. Elton protested.

"Well, it was no ghost that put me into that strait-jacket and it was no ghost that dragged away that ladder! I wasn't considering the ghost end of it, anyway. I was thinking about—you!"

Beautiful eyes clouded, Mrs. Elton stared for a moment.

"You see, we've been missing all night and still we—well, we can't tell the truth about where we've been. We—"

"I can't lie!" Annabel protested positively. "Not to Jackie!"

"Well, you can't tell him the truth and prove it by people who have ceased to exist!" William suggested. "You can't tell him about that place and then have that real state agent—just to mention one possibility—turn up and state that the house hasn't been tenanted for a year!"

"No!" breathed Annabel. "But I can't lie to him."

"And a tale like this one of ours needs darned solid evidence to back it up," William went on grimly. "You see, we're bound to admit that we were locked up tight—since it was the only thing that prevented our getting out. And if we get Peter or the nurse or the doctor to prove it, we're going to prove also that we were locked up together, and whether all the doctors in the world could make Jackie swallow a dose like that I—"

Really, he was thinking out loud! He

caught himself suddenly, but not before his heart smote him at Mrs. Elton's sudden pallor and the tears that welled up in her eyes.

"That's just it!" she cried terrifiedly. "We *have* to find some of them—but if we do find them we'll be worse off than if we hadn't found them at all!"

As had happened one or twice before, her childlike helplessness had its own bracing effect upon the perturbed William. Quite an unusual effect this time, it seemed, for he smiled very suddenly.

"Don't look so frightened," he said. "Jackie's not coming home until to-night, is he?"

"No."

"Then there's no real need of his knowing anything at all about it, I think. You'll have to—er—to lie to him about—"

"I can't!"

"You can if it's for Jackie's own happiness!"

"I—maybe," Mrs. Elton faltered. "If it really was—"

"It really will be!" William assured her dryly. "You'll have to tell him—wait a minute and we'll see what sounds best."

He paused, a dozen yards behind the Turnstile Inn carriage shed; wrinkles appeared between his eyes for a little; then he smiled.

"It's simple and easy," he said. "You'll have to tell him that you misunderstood the arrangements for last night. You'll say that you thought you were going to stay with your Aunt Fannie in the city instead of having her come to Blythedale. The telephone service up this way is vile, I suppose?"

"Awful!" sighed Mrs. Elton.

"Good enough! Connections were tangled and you made a mistake, my child. You went down to the city. You went to your aunt's hotel and found her missing. You did not know where she'd gone and you were afraid to come back alone. Then you did the most natural thing in the world; you went and spent the night with some intimate girl friend! Simple?"

"It's a lie."

"Yes, but it's a good, reliable lie and if you've got a really good girl friend it'll

hold water," William said impatiently. "Now! What's her name?"

Annabel sighed quiveringly.

"I might have gone to stay with Edith Dinsmore, if anything like that had really happened."

"Fine! Where does she live?"

"Oh, she and her husband have a suite at that little Hotel Conynge. He's down South somewhere now."

"Better still. Get her on the telephone just as soon as you reach home. I think that covers everything that's likely to turn up. Got it all pat?"

"Edith Dinsmore—Hotel Conynge—yes," Annabel murmured sorrowfully.

"Well, don't look so downcast," William said quietly. "I'm pretty strong for the truth myself as a rule, but there are times when it's no good at all and this is one of them."

"If it wasn't for Jackie's sake—I'd do anything in the world to be sure Jackie was happy!"

"Well, there you are, kid!" William laughed, with a brotherly pat on the little shoulder. "It's all right, you see. Some day or other, we may know the truth of this whole crazy business, and if we do we'll have to keep it to ourselves. Just now we've got the present fixed up and that's enough! I think we'll sneak that car out just as inconspicuously as possible."

"Yes! Because that boy saw us start off together last night!" Mrs. Elton trembled.

"Well, you walk around the shed and down to the road and he'll see me start off alone this morning. Better take that little path; you're not so likely to be noticed from the hotel."

With an encouraging grin he watched her start, waited a little and, very quietly indeed, entered the old carriage shed. The beautiful red roadster stood there, all alone. The Turnstile Inn itself was reassuringly still at this hour, too. William glanced at it as he approached his motor; some one would come out and demand storage money.

Still nobody had appeared as yet, and he was in the car with the engine running. William gazed at the silent hostelry and

backed out. There were no signs of life from the Turnstile, and with a grunt he backed on to the road, came about and sped down to Mrs. Elton, so small and forlorn at the roadside.

If speed had been necessary last night, it was more necessary this morning. William's eyes settled to a chronic squint as he pushed the excellent car onward—and onward, still faster and—

"My coat! I'm cold!" came plaintively and indistinctly through the rush of air.

William paused a little and gazed at the rack.

"Stolen, overnight," he said briefly. "Take mine!"

"No!"

"Yes!" said William and slid out of it feverishly. "It's too bad; that was a pretty coat."

"Yes, and I was going to use that twenty dollars to buy Jackie a—"

Heartless it may have been, but William lost the rest of it in his new burst of speed. There was no time for consoling now; houses blinked at them as little spots and vanished; telegraph poles, now that they had swung into the State road again, began to take on the aspect of a picket fence.

But they were getting back to Blythedale in great old time! William grinned excited pleasure at the sight of the familiar main street well ahead and brought his car to a more respectable pace.

His adventure was over. He had broken a promise to Helen and reaped the consequences. Before night, perhaps, he would have reaped another crop of them in a business way; just now it was really enough for William that they were safely back in the town and that little Mrs. Elton was provided with a plausible tale to account for the most outrageous night two people had ever encountered since the world's beginning.

William sighed. He owned a conscience. Really, dashing into that incredible place had been largely his own fault. He glanced at the exquisite little blond girl beside him, as he slowed down and finally stopped at the curb. She was on his conscience rather heavily; business or no business, he would have spent a good deal more

time and energy this morning to make sure that little Annabel was perfectly safe.

Which, thank Heaven, he needn't do! William smiled gently.

"You'd better walk on alone from here," he said. "It's only two blocks after you turn the corner—that's Griston Avenue. Somebody may have seen us when we were in the car yesterday."

"I was trying to ask you to do that," Annabel said, somewhat breathlessly, and permitted him to help her out of his coat. And then her big, round eyes fastened gravely on him. "Good-by, Mr.—Mr. Hervey!" she said dubiously.

"Good-by, Mrs. Elton, and don't lose your nerve," grinned William. "We've had a crazy experience, but it's all right. Only remember one thing!"

"Yes?"

"Once we're neighbors, we'll have to meet all over again for the first time, you know. Nellie 'll have to scrape an acquaintance with you, or something of the kind, and then we'll be introduced, of course. But until that time we're total strangers. We never heard of one another. We have never met."

"No! No! Never!" murmured Annabel. "Because if Jackie ever suspected—"

For some reason or other, William was not particularly interested in Jackie. He interrupted quite rudely:

"Exactly. And we needn't be seen here talking together. Good-by, little girl, and please try to forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive," sighed Annabel.

She was nodding and backing away now. William slipped his gears into first speed and waited.

"I'll start after you've turned the corner," he said softly.

Tender slip of womanhood that she was, she was doing that even now. William looked after her and shook his head. From the bottom of his heart he hoped that she was capable of conveying that innocent, necessary falsehood to Jackie in good, convincing style when he came home this evening—but doubt rose within him. She was so little, so much of a child.

He gazed on soberly as she vanished,

wisely enough without a backward turn. He let in his clutch and the jarless perfection of his roadster was in motion again.

And then William pushed out his clutch again and stopped short. She was running back! Yes, eyes bigger than before, but big with pure terror this time, she was coming straight for him. Only the car itself stopped her flight. Her small hands gripped the door.

"Jackie's back!" she panted. "Jackie's back home *now*, walking up and down our lawn and looking for me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR JACKIE'S SAKE.

EVERYTHING, of course, depends upon the individual view-point when it comes to estimating the importance of any given proposition. Your Bolshevik leader takes small account of embroidered veils, perhaps; but they are life's chief interest for the fellow who has a fortune invested in their manufacture. Your money baron forgets within five minutes that he has discharged the third assistant cashier; but the cashier himself may consider it a matter of sufficient moment to warrant a farewell step from the end of a secluded dock.

So with this thing of Mr. John Elton's return to Blythedale, hours ahead of his schedule.

To William it represented a new, minor phase of the experience, mildly interesting but not of any particular importance. Annabel's personal world, on the other hand, had turned upside down, had ceased revolving and was now jiggling up and down, causing her the most intense and obvious distress and sending actual radiations of fear from every delicate inch of her!

"He's back! Don't you understand? He's *back*!" she repeated, shaking William's arm, by way of rousing him to similar excitement.

William failed to rouse. His smile was very tolerant and soothing.

"Yes, of course," he said. "It is unexpected, but it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?"

"Certainly not," said William. "I don't invent lies that can be used only at a certain time of day. This one of ours will work just as well in the morning as in the evening."

"I wish you wouldn't grin and try to be funny!" Mrs. Elton said sharply. "I—I wanted time to calm down and think things out and try to understand it all and look like myself before I saw Jackie."

Every second was adding to her excitement. Bill Hervey, unsmiling now, shifted nearer to her and spoke very earnestly.

"Don't be absurd, Mrs. Elton. Get some sort of grip on yourself. This isn't important at all, really. You're the bravest kind of girl and you look very much like yourself. It's startling to find him here, but it needn't worry you."

"But—" Annabel began vigorously.

"I'll back around and go out some other way, so as not to pass the corner here. There's no need of Jackie seeing this blazing red and possibly remembering it later. That's the only detail that—"

"It isn't the only detail!" Annabel corrected hotly. "That's what I'm trying to tell you! I can't go home *like this!*"

"Like what?"

"Like *this*—without a coat or a satchel! Jackie isn't an imbecile, Mr. Hervey. He knows perfectly well that I'd never go anywhere to remain overnight without taking a coat and a bag."

Almost audibly, William's heart slumped!

"I hadn't thought of that!" he murmured.

"No, but I thought of it the very second I saw Jackie walking up and down there and looking for me."

William gazed about, frowning. There was a house on the corner, boarded up; there was a young garden back there, behind the house of somebody else; there was a boy across the way, delivering groceries. None of these furnished even the hint of an inspiration.

"And I know just exactly his state of mind by this time!" Annabel hurried on. "He didn't find me there and he didn't find any note from me. He called up Aunt Fannie—and by this time he's just about crazy."

Still William gazed about; still no inspiration came.

"What shall I do?" Annabel quavered piteously. "*I can't go home!*"

"Eh?" William started. "Of course you can go home. You—er—forgot your coat and grip and left them behind."

Annabel stamped her foot.

"That's too silly a lie," she said angrily. "I might possibly have forgotten the coat."

"You might just as well have forgotten the grip, too," William insisted.

"Not when it's up-stairs in our house and Jackie may have found it!"

She was a person of moods. Each little wave of anger seemed to be followed by a more pronounced wave of pure grief. Whether he cared to admit it or not, William knew that little Mrs. Elton was near a flood of tears by this time. Presently they would flow and—well, something would have to be done.

William knit his brows again and then, after a moment, smiled in a wild, grim way.

"Where's the bag now?"

"Up in our spare bedroom."

"Whereabouts—in the room, I mean?"

"I left it behind the door. Why?"

"Packed?"

"Yes, it's just as I brought it home day before yesterday. *Why?*"

"Just idle curiosity," William said sadly, as he stepped out of his car. "What does it look like?"

Still, there seemed to be something reassuring about him. Annabel studied him with large eyes which were growing trustful again.

"It's just a nice, brand-new tan leather kit bag, about so long."

"Do you suppose Jackie's been in there?"

"Why—probably—no!"

"Wait a minute," said William, and moved toward the edge of the boarded-up house for a view of Griston Avenue, giving the while much the impression of a red Indian stealing around the corner of a large rock for a glimpse of his enemy.

That was Jackie, then—that tall, slender young man, bareheaded, who stood upon the Elton lawn and gazed about in search of his vanished bride.

William nodded to himself; he had been in the house, at a guess, until the empty place had grown unbearable; now he would remain outdoors and watch, at least for a while longer. William hurriedly rejoined Annabel.

"Do you suppose your back door is open?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if it is, I'm going to sneak in that way while Jackie's out front, get your bag and bring it back here!" William said, rather astonishingly. "You just wait by the car."

"But if he sees you—if any one sees you—"

"That's just one of the chances I'm going to take," said William, with a brief grin. "If you've anything better to suggest—"

"I haven't."

"Neither have I," said the adventurer. "Don't be nervous. I have a hunch that I'm going to get away with it in great shape."

Having delivered which optimistic thought, William turned away abruptly and started for the corner behind. Thirty seconds and he had rounded it and disappeared from Mrs. Elton's view.

Down in the great city of New York there was business which *must* have his attention this morning, small though the remaining chance of putting through. Of more acute and immediate bearing upon the situation, Jackie could not be expected to stand out there indefinitely and gaze up and down the street. Another ten minutes, at most, and he would have taken to telephoning the police or to grabbing his hat and racing about to the neighbors for clues or—well, here was the vacant plot which William planned to cross on his way to the Elton home.

He considered the houses on either side. The commuting owners had left for the day, of course; their wives were doubtless busy within—or at least they were not in sight. After luncheon, they'd be at windows and on verandas, but just now William could detect no eyes upon him.

And where one wishes to do the unconventional without attracting undue attention

it is always wiser to move in the most conventional way. William, albeit his hair rose at the possibility of Jackie walking to the side of his lawn and looking to the rear, merely stepped on briskly, pushed through the hedge and marched down upon the house.

The back door was open! He came to it and tugged at the screen door. It gave immediately and William, the amateur burglar, stepped in—aye, and stepped straight ahead, too, for this was no time to pause and soliloquize!

Five seconds on the wrong side might mean that Jackie would return to his home and find the intruder; and indisputably Jackie had a perfect right, in such an event, to snatch out the pistol he might well enough be carrying and to put William in such condition that Loomis—once he had drawn checks for the undertaker and the incidentals—would be forced to seek another job!

It was a pleasant train of thought, of course, but it certainly lent speed to William's movements. One lightning glance through the curtains showed Mr. Elton down by the pretty gateway, conscientiously gazing up and down Griston Avenue. William set his teeth and sped up-stairs—and stopped short, cold! Which was the spare room? He had forgotten to ask!

A bead rolled from his forehead and down his nose. It wouldn't be the front room, of course. No, it would lie to the rear of the house and—well, it would be the room with a new yellow kit-bag behind the door.

On tiptoe, he shot to the back of the corridor, cursing his own stupidity. With a jerk, he opened the first door; and just there William's heart beat again, for he had made it at the first try. This was a spare bedroom and there was the bag!

His hunch, apparently, had been right. He gripped the prize and slid down-stairs again. A wild chuckle escaped him, too; Elton was leaning over the gate now, peering still! William waved one hand toward him and dashed for the rear door again—and he was out in the sunshine!

He was walking, slowly and unconcerned, toward the hedge and through it. Yes, and

now he was on the next street and still walking and nobody had hailed him!

For sheer luck, it beat even some former happy spots in William's rather lucky career. He sauntered on, ever more swiftly; he came to the car and Annabel, turning suddenly from her gloomy station beside it, emitted a single delighted squeal:

"*You did it!*"

"I did it!"

"You're a dear!" breathed little Mrs. Elton, as she accepted the treasure. "You're sure he hadn't seen it?"

"Well, I didn't stop to ask him about it."

"What if he *has* seen it?"

"Well—"

"You know, if—if I go home and Jackie knows that bag was in the house all the time, I'll—I'll *die*!"

As a possibility it was entertaining, to be sure. William preferred to close his eyes to it; Mrs. Elton's eyes, however, were very wide open.

"You're not going to—leave me alone?"

"I can't go back with you!" William gasped.

"No, but I meant that, if Jackie does know that I'm telling a lie, I'll have to tell him the whole truth and I can't do that alone. *I can't*. You'll have to be there to help me!"

"How?" William asked blankly.

"You'll just have to appear naturally in your own house," said Annabel, with a firmness that was almost stubbornness. "You might wait and—and then roll into your own yard in about ten minutes."

"But—"

"Oh, yes, and then you can come over—as a perfect stranger, you know—and that 'll be better, because if everything's all right it will furnish an—what is it—an alibi? It will show that we never saw each other before. You can just come over and introduce yourself and ask something about the baker or the trains; and if I'm safe I'll give you some kind of sign and then you can hurry away again. You'll do that?"

"Well—" William began again wretchedly. Because it meant more wasted time! It—he looked at Annabel and, even again, cast aside his own troubles. Annabel's lips were trembling.

"You—you don't want to do it!" she accused him. "You want to leave me to face it all alone, after all—"

"I've no idea of anything of the kind!" William said quickly. "You run along home, child, and I'll be there in five or six minutes."

"And you'll go into your own house and—and do everything naturally and not as if you were rushing it through? Because Jackie's an awfully keen observer and he's suspicious when other people would never think of being suspicious."

William laughed reassurance, although there was little laughter in him.

"Jackie 'll never suspect me. I promise you that. Now hurry!"

She squeezed his hand gratefully and sped away, her grip swinging. William, with a groan, resumed his place behind the wheel. At the very least, it meant fifteen precious minutes. Yes, and more likely twenty or twenty-five! And there was no earthly reason for this last wait, either! Whatever Annabel's opinion of him, the infernal Jackie was no wizard.

William groaned again as he tapped with his feet on the floor of his car—tapped and grunted and talked to himself and then, after a decent interval, started suddenly and rolled up Griston Avenue.

There would be no such thing as staring into the Elton home, of course, and then shooting ahead if all seemed serene. William sighed and turned into his own driveway. Whistling, he stopped the car beside his future home. Whistling, he leaped up the steps and opened its door.

And now—five minutes by the watch! William counted them off, cursing each one with deep feeling, but he smiled at the end of the last. Freedom was in sight! The very briefest of visits next door and—away!

William, every inch the pleasant, happy, friendly neighbor, stepped gaily down, considered the house next door apparently as a new thought, seemed to make up his mind and walked rapidly around the end of the hedge and across the lawn.

Nothing untoward was happening in there. Through the screen William observed two figures in the drawing-room—two figures as one, because Elton was hold-

ing his bride tightly to him and they were whispering!

A great sigh of relief escaped William Hervey. He played a little tune on the push-button and turned away as they parted suddenly and, together, hurried to the door.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I'm sure!" said William blithely. "I'm the man who is going to live next door. My name is Hervey."

With a hearty thrust, Mr. Elton's hand went out and William gripped it.

"I say, we're awfully glad to know you!" Mr. Elton stated. "Our name's Elton, in here!"

"Then I'm tickled to death to make your acquaintance, Mr. Elton," William laughed readily.

"And my wife," added the gentleman. "Where are you, sweetie? Oh, there you are! This is Mr. Hervey, our new neighbor-to-be."

Quite superfluous, of course, was this last introduction. Mr. Elton did not know that, nor was there anything about Annabel just then to cause him even a flutter of suspicion. Glowing, lovely, Annabel hurried forward to shake William's hand.

"I'm so glad to know you!" she said simply. "It's fearfully good of you to run in like this!"

"Is it?" laughed William.

"Yes, really. We were so afraid, coming up here, that people might not be neighborly. You're moving in?"

"Oh, not yet by any means. In fact, I'm not even married yet!"

Mrs. Elton clapped her hands in glad surprise.

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried. "Then there'll be two silly honeymoon couples side by side!"

"You two—" William protested unbelievably.

"Only three weeks!" laughed Mr. Elton and went so far as to slip an arm about Annabel.

So it was all right! The lie had gone over to perfection; nay, as a successful untruth it was not too much to say that this one of William's had gone over with a loud, resounding crash. The adoring Jackie

suspected nothing—nor would he ever suspect anything now! The episode was closed and just as rapidly as he could make a decent escape William would flee and resume the journey he should have completed before dark yesterday.

He grew businesslike.

"I thought I saw a man moving around in here, when I was over there at my house. I wanted to ask you about the morning trains, Mr. Elton."

"What time do you want to make town? About nine?"

"About that."

"There's a dandy train out of here at eight-nine—runs all the year round and they put on cars enough so that everybody has a seat."

"Fine!"

"You stop here for me the first morning you go down and I'll show you how to capture the best spot in the smoker," suggested the friendly Elton. "Up for the day, Mr. Hervey?"

"Oh, no!" William lied cheerily. "I had to bring up some odds and ends and it was such a wonderful morning that I thought I'd do it before I settled down to work for the day. I'll have to be getting back, too. Thanks for the dope about the trains and I'm very pleased to have met you both."

It was enough, of course. He edged away. He had done his duty and all was well—every glance from Annabel told him that; every grin of her Jackie's bespoke a man happy and wholly at ease in his mind. Yes, it was more than enough and now William would flee.

He reached the edge of the veranda, while the Eltons stood in the doorway. Mr. Elton nodded and smiled.

"Next time you turn up I may be more normal," he said. "I mean, not so shaky and white about the gills—if I'm still that. I've had an infernal scare!"

"A scare?" William echoed politely.

Elton shook a finger at his bride.

"That little woman there!" he said accusingly. "I thought she'd dematerialized completely!"

William's inquiring stare grew more polite and puzzled.

"Her aunt, in the city, was to have come out here and remained with her last night," Elton explained. "Doubtless she did, as we shall hear later. But Mrs. Elton managed to confuse the arrangements, somehow or other, and went down to stay with her aunt!"

"Oh!" said William. "Yes?"

"And I landed here this morning, instead of to-night, as I had expected—and the house was entirely empty. And just when I'd decided to call out the police and begin hiring private detectives, along she came, as cheerful and unconcerned as you please, swinging her—"

He stopped suddenly, staring at the floor of the corridor. There was a little touch of the dramatic about Mr. Elton; he seemed given to gestures. Speaking of the trains, he had indicated the direction of the station; about to speak of Mrs. Elton's grip, he had pointed an accusing finger at the satchel in question.

But now, to William's astonishment, his hand had dropped. For a moment, he scowled and bent toward the tan leather

affair; now he stood erect and gazed at his wife with an amazed:

"Where'd *that* come from?"

"That?" Mrs. Elton echoed. "That's my bag, dear."

"It—it isn't!" Elton stammered, quite confusedly.

"But of course it is! Why, what—what is it, Jackie? What makes you look like that? Aren't you well or—"

Mr. Elton laughed suddenly, annoyed, apologetically.

"My whole nervous system must have been jarred like— I say, Annabel, that isn't the bag you brought in?"

"Why, you saw me bring it in!"

"Yes, and I—I put in down there myself!" Elton muttered. "I—you're *sure* that's the one you carried?"

"It's my own bag, Jackie!"

"But it is not! That's just the point!" Jackie persisted. "That's *my* grip! That's the grip I took up-stairs not half an hour ago and put in the maid's room!"

With which rather striking statement he reached for it!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Pete's Polite -- Perhaps

by Charles
Wesley Sanders



I.

"**W**ITH one hand tied behind my back I could do it." Pete Blandin made the assertion with a fierce look in his eyes and with a flourish

of his big right hand. None of those who heard him disputed what he had said. —Pete was foreman of a paving gang.

Three counties in Ohio had joined hands and, with the aid of the State, had started to pave the main highway which crossed

them. From the westernmost county limit to the easternmost was a distance of eighty miles.

The company which had been awarded the contract had guaranteed that the work would be done "before snow flew." The time was now mid-June, and the work was well under way.

Between the two county seats six gangs of men were at work. The company fed them and "slept" them and housed them right on the job. All sorts of men were among them. There were skilled workmen who knew the science of concrete paving from A to Z; there was unskilled labor; there were numberless farmers with their teams. The farmers had been attracted from the soil by the high wages offered. These men were naturally of varying sizes, as all aggregations of men are. Some were little men, some medium-sized men, some big men, and some veritable giants in a day when giants are not many.

Pete was in the latter classification. He hadn't much education, but he was naturally shrewd. He was a keen observer, and he rarely misjudged a man. Good judgment of men and a tremendous strength had lifted him out of the day-laborer class. If you had asked him, he would have told you that good judgment of men was his main asset. Those who had felt his fists asserted that without his strength he would not have got no place at all.

Pete's assertion, quoted above, had been made as pertaining to a man whom Pete and his workers knew only by reputation. They didn't even know his name. But they had heard he was "some fighter." It was reported that, after several lesser battles, he had bested one Mike O'Leary, who was a wildcat Irishman. Mike was foreman of No. 3 gang, to the east. He and Pete had never clashed, but there were those who said they would make a little bet that Mike could knock Pete's head off.

Therefore the unknown must be a man of great physical prowess.

"Any of you doubt that I could lick him?" Pete now asked, out of a silence which had followed his statement.

"I don't doubt it," one man said, "but I would like to see you do it. From what

they say, this fellow is all to the joyful when he puts up his dukes. It might be a fight worth seeing."

The man's tone was respectful, but there was a hint of challenge in what he said. Pete regarded him thoughtfully, the while he chewed a blade of grass.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll just call up the boss over to that camp, tell him I'm very short of men, and ask him for the loan of one man. I will mention this fellow, and see if I can't get him over here. Mind you, I'm not goin' to jump him the minute he shows up; that would be too raw. They say he is a good worker, and so long as he tends to his business I'll not molest him. But if he is the scrapper they say he is, I guess trouble will be brewin' from the start. Where trouble is, there am I, an' you all know it."

As he finished speaking, a girl appeared in the doorway of a near-by tent and shook a big bell.

"It's dinner, the girl says," Pete said, rising. "Dinner and Sunday an' plenty of time to eat. What more does a man want?"

They trooped into the tent and sat down at a long, rough-board table. The girl directed several colored men in the serving of the food. When all the men had been supplied she went outside the tent.

She was Pete's daughter, a young woman of twenty-three. She had stepped into her mother's place when her mother had died five years before. Nearly all her life had been spent in camps like this. She could not remember when her father had not worked in a camp of some sort or other. He had bossed gangs of men while those built railroads and highways, bridges and viaducts, and dug coal and iron mines.

As in other camps, her job was to make sure that there was plenty of food on hand and that it was cooked and served on time. It was no small task to fill those empty stomachs.

She was the only woman among all those men, but she was without fear of them. She was resourceful and courageous herself, and one or two cheeks had borne the marks of her palm when men had tried to become familiar by word, look, or act. But her

greatest security lay in her father's dominance of the men.

Perhaps love was a little beyond Pete, but devotion and admiration were not. He was very proud of his daughter. He was proud of her looks and of her accomplishments. She was indeed a handsome girl. The scenes amid which she moved were a fitting setting for her kind of beauty.

There were only half a dozen men in all that crew who were taller than she. Her features were cast in noble mold, and her gray, calm eyes were large between long, dark lashes. Her hair was jet and abundant. Full-bosomed, broad-hipped, she had a fine stateliness.

A child clinging to her hand would have completed an inspiring and impressive picture; she was the sort of woman whom nature magnificently dowers for motherhood.

Though Pete was rough and uncouth, he had never been parsimonious with his daughter. He had sent her through school before her mother's death, and she had been graduated with honors, though she had had to flit from one institution to another because of Pete's migrations. Pete gave her money liberally for clothes, and she had good taste in that direction. As soon as this Sunday dinner was over she would don finery and leave the camp to visit a neighboring town. As in all other towns she had visited, people would turn on the street to look at her.

As she turned back into the tent to see if the inevitable second helping was required by any of the men she heard one of them say:

"It 'd be a joke if this fella was real good and should lam Pete, now, wouldn't it?"

She walked up behind the man. She appreciated her father.

"Who's going to lam my dad?" she asked.

"Nobody, ma'am," the man answered.

"What did you mean, then?"

The man was confused. Then he remembered that Ruth Blandin was no tattle-tale.

So he told her what Pete's intentions were.

Ruth wasn't interested. Her father could take care of himself. She didn't know the stranger, and therefore she was not concerned about what might happen to him. The dinner over, she donned her finery and went away in her father's flivver.

Pete called up the neighboring camp, and asserted that he was short of help, and would the foreman lend him a man? The foreman would. Would he, then, lend Pete this fellow they was all talking about as bein' the best worker and the best scrapper on the "lane"?

There was a pause. On the telephone you never can tell what a pause means. You can't study the face of the person you're talking to. There is no chance to guess what his thoughts are. You just have to wait and make the best of it.

In a moment the other foreman said:

"I was thinkin', Pete. I'd like to oblige you, but I can't do it. This fellow is my best worker. He can do two men's work in a pinch. I ain't got none too many men myself. I got lots of promises. They intend to come when they promise, I guess, but most times they don't. Hell may be paved with good intentions, but country roads ain't. However, I'll send you a man."

II.

THE car line was a mile south of the camp. Coming back from town, Ruth overtook a workman carrying a suit-case. She invited him into the flivver; he accepted.

"I am very grateful," he said.

Ruth had lived in camps all her life, but she was a woman for a' that. Few men had been "grateful" to her; none had been "very grateful."

She glanced at her passenger. He was tall—an inch taller than herself, perhaps—but he lacked the huge bulk of her father and some of the other men. Why, he was almost slim. He was smooth-shaven, and he had brown, curly hair and brown eyes.

"Isn't he nice-looking?" said Ruth to herself.

She came to the road down which she must turn to reach the camp. She asked the stranger if he intended to keep on.

"I'm going to the construction camp," he said.

"O-oh," said Ruth, as she recalled the disclosures which the man in the tent had made. "My father is foreman there. Surely you're not the terrible fighter that has been working at the other camps."

The stranger laughed.

"I shouldn't think anybody would want to be Dick Granger," he said. "That ruffian!"

"I'm glad," the girl said. "Father thought he could get him—this Granger—over here, and they would determine who was the best man. I didn't think you were a fighter."

"My name is Royce," the man said—"James Royce. No, I'm not much of a fighter. I don't like to fight."

They drew up at the camp as the sun was setting, a blood-red ball in the cloud-filmed west.

Pete was in front of the mess-tent, and he walked toward the flivver as soon as he saw that it held a passenger in addition to his daughter.

Royce opened the door, stepped down, and extended a hand to Ruth. Blushing, she took the hand and alighted. Pete noted the blush, and a questioning look came into his eyes.

Royce turned about and faced him.

"The foreman of No. 3 camp sent me here to work for you," he said simply.

"I was hopin' he would change his mind and send me his walloper," Pete said in disgust.

"Dick Granger?" Royce said. "He wouldn't want to part with him."

Ruth had stepped apart from them and she was now listening to what Royce said and watching him. Half a dozen workmen had gathered about Pete and Royce.

"Granger, eh?" said Pete. "Is he a fighter?"

"The best I ever saw," Royce said.

"A pity he didn't send him here, then," Pete declared.

"Why?" Royce asked.

"I'd have taken him over the jumps," Pete returned, with a harsh laugh.

The harshness of his laugh was not altogether due to the fact that he was thinking

of possible combat with the champion of the other camps; he was bothered by the blush he had seen on his daughter's smooth cheeks.

He turned to her. She fled to her own tent. Pete followed her, pushed aside the flap, and entered.

"Where'd you pick up this guy?" he asked.

"On the road, a mile from here," Ruth answered.

Pete was direct in all his ways. "Why'd you blush when he helped you out of the machine?"

Ruth looked at him with eyes a trifle too cool. There was a suggestion of ice in her voice when she answered:

"Because he was polite. I don't see any politeness going to waste around this camp. I've never seen it in any of your camps. Am I your waitress or am I a human woman? Do you think I never get tired of these roughs you have working for you?"

This was a new experience for Pete. Like all men of his kind, he had difficulty in dealing with new experiences.

"It ain't possible that you're stuck on this fellow already, is it?" he asked. "You couldn't naturally pick up with him serious in a ride of a few minutes, could you?"

It was possible. Ruth was given to analysis of men, and guarded herself against their attacks in any form. But Royce had been different from other men. There had been a subtle and delicious appeal in his deference to her.

"I like him," she said.

"Uhuh," said Pete, and he backed out of the tent.

He scented danger to his daughter, and if he had been a weaker man he would have banished Royce at once. As it was, he sought out Royce.

"What's your line?" he asked.

"I'm just a fetch-and-carry man," Royce answered.

"You'll find plenty fetch-and-carry 'bout here," Pete said. "You don't look like you was very hefty. If you can't do the work, you better say so. I got no place for loafers."

"I'll do the work," Royce said quietly,

"Where do you get this idea of helpin' women out of machines, an' other polite ways I suppose you've got?"

"That's what a gentleman usually does," Royce said.

Pete spat out an oath of incredulity.

"Gentleman?" he repeated. "Before Gawd, is there a place in a pavin' gang for a gentleman?"

Royce said nothing, and Pete walked away. He sought out a bunch of his men sitting in the cool dark behind the sleeping quarters.

"This new man announces himself as a gentleman," he said. "In the mornin' I expect you all better begin sayin' 'No, sir,' an' 'Yes, sir,' to me. 'If you please,' and 'Thank you kindly,' might not come amiss, neither."

They caught the spirit of Pete's jest, and in the morning there was an air of politeness all through the camp. Men bowed grotesquely and uttered profuse thanks to each other. Every request was prefaced by a polite "Please." At dinner-time the merriment reached its height. "Please" and "Thanks" were so often used that it was a wonder there were enough of those ingratiating words to go around.

But, like a little learning, excessive politeness may be a dangerous thing. Ruth approached the table. A man looked up. Mockingly he asked:

"Please, Miss Ruth, may I have s'more coffee?"

"Get up," said Ruth unexpectedly.

The man, amazed, rose.

"Get out of the tent," Ruth commanded. "When you come back to supper, just leave your funniness at the door."

The man went out.

Ruth let her cool, gray eyes travel about the table. The men had been staring at her. At the scorn in her eyes their own eyes dropped to their plates. The meal was finished in silence.

The incident bred a swift change in the attitude of the men toward Royce. Mock politeness was superseded by real dislike and hostility. As Royce worked among them they growled at him. One or two of them cursed him. He had nothing to say in return.

Supper was consumed in absolute silence, so far as talk was concerned. The men gobbled their food with their eyes on their plates. They did not look at Royce.

When the meal was finished, Ruth went to her tent. Through the flap she saw Royce standing in front of the mess-tent. She opened the flap and walked out into the late afternoon sunshine.

"Good evening," she said.

"Good evening," said Royce. "It 'd be a nice night for a little stroll."

"It would," Ruth agreed.

They walked down the road, watched by the gang, including Pete. It was hard for the men to refrain from comment, but they knew that comment would not be safe. A storm-cloud had gathered on Pete's big brow. There was bad weather ahead for Royce.

III.

RUTH and Royce were gone for two hours. The sky was star-choked, and the night music had begun, and scented breezes were stirring the trees when they returned. Standing at the edge of the road, Pete watched them approach.

He could not guess what they had talked about in their absence, any more than he had been able to guess what the foreman had been thinking about when he had talked to that foreman over the phone and a pause had come.

But he saw, as the two neared him, that their faces were aglow and their eyes bright. He thought they exchanged whispers just before they reached him. He wasn't sure about that, but suspicion was enough in his present frame of mind.

He laid a heavy arm on Royce's arm.

"I want to talk to you, young fellow," he said. "Run along, Ruth."

He had thought Ruth might be defiant again, and he was prepared to let his strong will clash against hers. He was thoroughly aroused. She'd find out she couldn't rule him.

But Ruth obediently ran along and disappeared within her tent. Pete confronted Royce, his big face red with anger, and his big fists knotted at his sides. Before he spoke, under the urge of his anger, those

fists began to swing in a menacing movement.

"What th' hell do you mean by walkin' out with my daughter?" Pete demanded.

"Why, we were just enjoying the cool of the evening," Royce said.

"Leave her be from now on, or I'll smash you," Pete said.

"Yes, sir."

More of that cussed politeness! The red died out of Pete's face, and his fists unclenched. How was a man going to thrust out against anything so soft, so utterly without resistance, as Royce was now?

"Oh, cripes!" and Pete walked away.

As he went he was aware that he had failed. How could you trust a man that merely gave you a "Yes, sir," in answer to a threat? Pete had planned to cuff Royce if he had resisted and then to kick him along the road till Royce would have been glad to disappear from the camp.

So Pete went to the flap of his daughter's tent. He called to her.

"Come in," she said in muffled tones.

Pete entered. He stopped just inside and stared at his daughter in astonishment. She was sitting before a table and her head was buried in her thrust-out arms. Her shoulders were shaking.

"Why, Ruth," Pete whispered, "what's the matter?"

He knew that Ruth was crying, and he was terror-stricken. Something had happened to her who was his first-born and his last. She was the only feminine thing in his life—all he had to relieve the roughness of his way.

He thought his heart had died when her mother had passed on, and it had only come to life when the girl had slowly grown into a likeness of what the mother had been when he had married her. And now grief had come to her.

"What's the matter, Ruth?" he asked again.

The girl lifted her face. It was wet, but her eyes were not red. Indeed, they were softly shining.

"I've lost all chance of happiness," she said, with a doleful sigh.

"It's something about this here Royce?" Pete asked.

"Yes," said Ruth. "Sit down. I may as well tell you about it."

He sank down on a camp-stool.

"Royce is only working on this paving job to get money to finish his education," Ruth went on. "He's been working every summer since he started to college. The high wages here attracted him. He's in a scientific school. He's going to be an engineer."

"The idea of getting an education has always been before him like a star."

"He said that?" Pete interpolated.

"He said that," Ruth assented. "He has slaved to get to be somebody—to rise in the world. He was a poor boy of poor parents. He's going to be a big man in the engineering world."

"He is a gentleman. I love him. He loves me. It was sudden with us, dad. It happened right over there on the road when I gave him a lift in the car. I knew he was different from other men. I want to marry him."

Pete stood up. A gentleman, huh? A soft-handed son of a gun that thought he was better 'n other folks? Where did he get that stuff?

"I've gave you everything in reason that you ever asked for, Ruth," he said sternly. "But I ain't going to give you this man. You're not going to marry him. I won't give my consent. I don't like him, and when I don't like a man I hate him. There ain't no happy meejum for me."

"That's what I told Mr. Royce," Ruth said. "I know you pretty well. But it makes no difference. There's another reason—a bigger reason—why I couldn't have him. He wouldn't have me."

"What?"

Pete cracked out the word, staring at his daughter.

"That whippersnapper wouldn't have you—he wouldn't marry a daughter of old Pete Blandin? Why, damn him, I'll—"

Prospective enjoyment cooled Pete's wrath. Presently he was going to wring Royce's neck, just as he would have wrung a chicken's. It'd be fun. Meantime, he'd have an explanation.

"Just why won't he marry you?" he asked.

"Well, he says he can't marry the daughter of a man like you," Ruth answered. "He thinks, too, that this rough life has spoiled me; and I guess it's all true. He expects to marry a lady some time, and I guess he ought to. Some day he'll have a fine house and servants and all that, and where would I be then?"

"You love this man, do you?" Pete asked with dangerous calm. "He loves you? You really want to marry him?"

"I do. Indeed I do. I know he loves me; and I love him."

Pete drew himself up to his six feet two and stretched his big arms above his head.

"I've always gave you what you wanted within reason, haven't I?" he asked.

Ruth nodded.

"Leave everything to me, then," Pete said, and he ducked out of the tent.

IV.

RUTH sat within the tent, wondering if she had done and said everything just as her lover had instructed her to do and say it. She thought she had. When he had given his instructions, after she had said she couldn't marry him without her father's consent, she had wondered just how they would smooth the path to the altar.

But Royce had seemed supremely confident of the outcome. He had said that Pete was the type of man who fattened on opposition. He agreed that it would be a shame if Ruth parted from her father in anger or ran away and left him alone. He said that if she would do what he told her to do Pete would give his consent.

She sat on in the tent for ten minutes. She could not guess what the next development would be. Of course her father would seek out Royce, but what would he do?

She leaped to her feet as that question came to her. She saw now what her father would do. While she had talked to him her thoughts had been with Royce. Love-mists had shrouded her usually keen perception.

Why, her father knew only one way to overcome a man who opposed him. That way was to beat the man. And Royce wasn't nearly so big as her father.

She ran to the tent flap and looked out. Neither her father nor Royce was in sight. But a strange man stood before the mess-tent, looking about. None of the gang was to be seen. Ruth hastened over to the stranger.

"Something I can do for you?" she asked as an introduction. "Have you seen my father or any of the men?"

"I haven't," the stranger replied. "I'm O'Leary, foreman from No. 3 camp. I was lookin' for your dad. I sent a man over here to work for him. It was Sunday evening, and I thought I'd just run over to see how they was hittin' it off."

"You mean Mr. Royce?"

"Huh?"

"You mean Mr. James Royce, who came from your camp to work for father?"

"Yes, I mean him—James Royce. That's it. A high-soundin' name for a high-steppin' fella."

Ruth stared about her. She couldn't imagine what had happened to make the camp a deserted place. As she looked, she caught sight of the cook running across a field in the rear of the tent.

"Here," she called—"here, Jiggers! Wait a minute!"

The cook stopped, looked undecided, and seemed about to go on again.

Ruth ran after him. O'Leary ran after Ruth. They caught up with the cook.

"Where's father? Where's all the gang? Where are you going?" Ruth panted.

"Your father took Royce up in the woods—to pick daffydowndillys, so he said," the cook answered. "He told the gang to stay where they was. Me, I had to get the breakfast ready to be cooked. I'm just startin'. All the rest of them took after your dad and Royce the minute they was out of sight. It means ructions when your dad gets Royce up there in the woods alone."

"Come on," Ruth said. "Dad will murder Mr. Royce."

They ran across the field and came to the edge of a dim woods. Into this they ran, and presently they came upon the gang. The men were hiding behind trees, peering forth at a little clearing which was just ahead of them.

In the center of this clearing stood Royce and Pete, confronting each other.

There was intense silence in the woods. Pete's first words came clearly to Ruth's ears:

"I'm goin' to lick you good."

"Perhaps," said Royce.

"You said I was a rough-neck."

"Aren't you?"

"You think my daughter isn't good enough for you."

"Is she?"

"You're goin' to be a gentleman and marry a lady, are you?"

"I'm going to marry a lady, the finest in the world."

"You told my daughter you loved her."

"Yes."

"You bone!"

With the last words just out of his mouth, Pete leaped. His right fist described an arc. At the end of the arc the fist was supposed to connect with Royce's jaw. It didn't. The jaw wasn't there.

Then Royce's own fist was stabbed into Pete's solar plexus. Pete uttered a grunt in which pain and surprise were intermingled.

It was a very brief grunt, for immediately Royce's left fist and then his right found Pete's jaw.

Pete was filled with stark amazement that a man of Royce's build could deliver blows so mighty, and while he dully wondered about that, Royce struck him twice again, once on the solar plexus and once on the side of the jaw.

The latter blow rocked Pete's head and filled him with wild rage. The rage killed all caution, and Pete tried to throw himself on his antagonist.

He awoke to find the gang circled about him, and his daughter bending over him solicitously.

Royce was not in sight. Pete got unsteadily to his feet, shaking off the hands outstretched to assist him.

He looked about for Royce.

That eminent pugilist was sitting with his back to a big tree, calmly smoking a cigarette.

"An' not a mark on him," quoth Pete.

"Nary mark," said O'Leary, with a grin.

Royce rose and walked over to Pete, edging his way among the men. When he stopped he was at Ruth's side.

"I said I was going to marry a lady, the finest in the world," he said. "This is the lady. Am I going to marry her?"

Pete's head ached. His jaw was sore. The nerves in his solar plexus were twitching. He had whipped many men in his time. This was the first time he had been thoroughly whipped himself. It makes a difference with a man like Pete.

Pete felt queerly humble and small, though he didn't want to feel so. He had a notion he ought to go on with the scrap. He had always said to himself that he would fight till he died if he ever met a better man than himself.

But he didn't want to die. He didn't want to fight any more. He had had enough. He just wanted to sit down under a tree and rest.

He sat down. He looked at his comely daughter. He didn't understand the expression on Ruth's face. There was pride there and admiration for Royce, and concern for her bruised father; but Pete would be danged if he could see any regret there. He had taken a beating from a whippersnapper, and Ruth wasn't sorry.

Pete looked at Royce. Well, now, was Royce a whippersnapper? He had handled himself like he was a real man. Pete could be just—always tried to be so—but it was tarnation hard to be just in circumstances like these.

He cast about for reasons and explanations. Then he seemed to get one explanation.

"Have I been framed?" he asked.

"I'll tell you," said Royce. "I knew you wouldn't want your daughter to marry a man unless he ate with his knife and never said 'Please' or 'Thank you.' You didn't think manners sat well on a man. So I just made up my mind to teach you a lesson. I knew if I sent a message to you by Ruth that I thought myself too good to marry her, you'd want me to do it. You're a bundle of contrariness, old Pete. You want to be stirring up trouble all the time. Well"—Royce sighed gently—"I don't know that I've ever run away from trouble,

I've never sought entrance to a quarrel, but, being in it, I've had recourse to the solar-plexus blow and the hook to the jaw. If you're fast on your feet, these blows will do the business even with a good, strong man like you, Mr. Blandin. I regret the necessity."

Pete got up and extended his hand.

"I don't get you," he said heavily. "I didn't know a man of your weight who could talk like a professor, an auctioneer, a preacher, an' a lawyer, all in one, could likewise fight. H'ever, there's my mitt. You can take it or leave it, just as you like."

"You withdraw your objections to my marriage to your daughter?"

"I expect I do. Mebbe when you're my son-in-law you'll teach me them blows."

"You see," said Royce, "I've had to scrape to get an education. I run a little gymnasium in the city where I go to college, and winters I teach the boys boxing. It pays pretty well, but I don't like it. I'll be glad when the time comes for me to lay aside the gloves forever."

"Well, don't lay 'em aside till you teach me what you know," Pete said.

He spoke to Royce, but he looked at O'Leary, foreman of No. 3 camp.

"When I get them blows learned, I'll beat you black and blue, O'Leary," he stated. "What do you mean by ringin' in a dark horse on me when all I wanted was

for you to send over that rough-neck Dick Granger?"

"Aw, quit quarrelin', Pete," O'Leary retorted. "Can't you take a little joke? You asked me for Granger, and I considered the matter. You'll mind that I didn't answer you at once. I stood there with the phone to my ear and grinned in delight, thinking of the mistake you was due to make."

"You been strung and framed and licked, Pete Blandin. What more do you want? Quit quarrelin' with your betters and study the lesson this lad has set you. He is Dick Granger, and none other. He's a slim lad, peaceful and polite when you leave him be, but he's a hell-bender when he's crossed."

"An' I'm thinkin' it is not his hands and feet that he fights with. I'm thinkin' it's his noodle, Pete. That's why he has the edge on you. Take a leaf out of his book and become polite and peaceful your own self."

Pete stared hard at O'Leary. Then, bowing low, he said:

"I am grateful to you, Mr. O'Leary, for your very welcome and educatin' advice. Please will you come to my daughter's weddin' and bring the missus with you? You will? I thank you, Mr. O'Leary, from the bottom of my heart. Don't mention it. The pleasure is all mine—what there is of it."

THE NEXT INVENTION

O H, what is man? A being strange,
Endowed with restless soul,
Who, not content with what he gains,
Must seek yet higher goal.
He learns the secrets of the earth
And heaven's starry crowd;
He boldly rides the raging deep;
Brings lightning from the cloud.

Not satisfied with mastering
All earthly locomotion,
He conquers now the very air—
A once absurd old notion.
And such is man, that even higher
He'll soar till he attain
The heights above the air itself
With his ethereoplane.

Blanche Elizabeth Wade.

The Yellow Emerald

by Francis James

Author of "Prey," "Cold Sunburn," etc.



COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

MAG. ARCH. V. 43, N. S.

BRUCE TARTON glanced up from his pile of books. The library messenger had tossed a piece of paper down at his elbow and gone along.

On the slip Tarton, in his precise, neat hand, had written the following: "Mag. Arch. Vol. 43, N. S.," and put it in the call box; and then across the face of it, some understrapper clerk, buried in the stacks, had, ten minutes later, stamped the maddening verdict: "Out," and sent it back.

Tarton picked it up, leaned back in his chair and scowled at it. That was always his blasted luck—"out," or "missing," or "in use," or something else. He never could get any of the books he wanted, it seemed, and of all he had ever called for, that particular volume of that particular magazine was the most bitterly needed.

He muttered imprecations under his breath, and then stopped short. The girl, over across and three seats away, down the long table, had stopped writing. She was listening and looking at him slyly out of the corners of her eyes. How much had she heard? She was smiling covertly over her big book. Tarton grinned inwardly. Probably she had had things sent back, too.

For the hundredth time, Tarton let himself get to wondering about her—who she was, and what she was doing, buried in

there day after day. She was far too ravingly pretty, he had already assured himself, to be any one's secretary sent to dig out dry facts, or a struggling college student, boning up a thesis.

Although her suit was obviously not from Fifth Avenue, and her shoes, as he glimpsed them under the table, had unquestionably weathered more than one rainstorm, rubberless, there was about her the indefinable essence of class—the aura of fineness, refinement, and character that is as intangible, and yet as convincing as the fragrance of a rose.

And pretty! Tarton, twenty-one, poor and struggling, almost a perfect stranger in the great city, had had his moments of temptation and despair, when it seemed as if from sheer loneliness he must risk offending her—and smile, at least.

But he jolly well hadn't. Only too well he knew what that would mean—another seat for her, distant from him, frozen disdain, perhaps an admonition from the corridor bluecoat.

Heedless, he relaxed his fingers. A vagrant breeze lilting in the window caught the paper as it dropped from his hand, and sent it scaling down the table. It caught for a second under the corner of one of the mighty tomes that the girl had built up around her like a barricade; then at the next breath freed itself and fluttered into her fingers.

Tarton, laughing, was already out of his seat, pursuing it. Their fingers touched as she reached it to him across the table.

"That breeze—" he began.

"Wasn't it funny!" she said, laughing back. "Just as though it knew we wanted to get acquainted, and was bound to help us out!"

"What!" he stammered, reddening. "You don't mean that you—you thought of it—you're not lonesome, too?"

She nodded, mischievously grave.

"I've been watching you a week, wondering when you were going to begin to be sociable. You've wasted a lot of perfectly good time, you know. I would have smiled at you the first day, if you had tried. That would be perfectly proper, as long as we are both in such a respectable place. But I suppose you must be from Boston, so of course you couldn't even *look* at me without an introduction. And then this happened, so we didn't have to pretend any more."

"You're mistaken," laughed Tarton, "I'm *not* from Boston. And as for the other—I wanted, awfully, to—to smile, anyway, but I guess I'm a little old-fashioned—"

He dropped the sentence, half done. A curious change had come over the girl.

As she spoke, her eyes had dropped unconsciously to the slip, which she was holding face up. At sight of what was written on it, her cheeks went white. Her eyes widened in surprise, her hand dropped his and flew to her throat.

"Why—why—" she stammered, looking up. "Why—what—what do you want—with that? I mean," she corrected hastily, "I'm surprised that any one—you *mustn't* call for that book!"

Tarton stared his astonishment. She had slumped down into her chair, her cheeks flushing and paling alternately. In the midst of his surprise—and pretty considerable surprise, at that—he kept thinking, round and round in a foolish, infatuated circle—how wonderful she was—her hair, and her eyes, of soft, warm gray, and her mouth. What was the matter?

He pulled himself about half-way down to earth.

"Why—why not?" he demanded. "I'm writing an article—on Egypt. I must have it. What's the matter with it, anyway? Why *mustn't* I see it?"

She was recovering herself. She laughed deprecatingly, her confusion evident in the handkerchief which she was twisting into knots in her fingers. She had been very indiscreet, and she was realizing it.

"Well—I don't know anything about it," she temporized. "That is, anything that I can tell. Anything that you have a right to know. It's—"

"That I have a right to know," he exclaimed. "Why haven't I? As much as anybody? What's in the thing, anyway?"

She stood up suddenly, mistress of herself once more. And Tarton knew that he would never find out.

"I'm sorry," she said, smiling frankly. "I spoke impulsively. I was—as you saw—a good deal surprised. But I oughtn't to have been. I shouldn't have said a word. It's—it's something that doesn't concern you—that can't possibly interest you. Only others. But—what I said is nevertheless true. It would be—dangerous"—she spoke very deliberately, he noticed, as she chose that word—"very dangerous knowledge indeed, for you to have. You must drop the matter here. Forget it—and forget me. Neither—"

"Forget you!" he interjected. "Why? How can I? If you imagine, after this—"

"Neither of us," she finished, "will do you any good. We—"

"Neither of you—will do me good!" he exploded. "I don't want to be done good. I want to know you, and I want this book. There's an article in it I have to have before to-morrow, besides whatever else it is that interests you so, and belongs to no one else. Of course, I want to see that now. I'm going to see it. Anyway, it's preposterous to get so excited over a plain magazine. The thing was published, wasn't it? It came out publicly and went to the subscribers, and all around. If I can't get a copy here—I'll go elsewhere. Of course I can get it—and of course I will—"

"I didn't intend to tell you you *mustn't* look at it," she interrupted gently. "Of course, I couldn't do that. I think what I

meant was to *ask* you not to try to see it—as a favor to me. You'll do that, won't you?"

"You *did* say I mustn't see it," he insisted. "You said it was dangerous—it wouldn't do me any good. Of course, that's nonsense. I'm not a child. How could a magazine article hurt me?"

The girl sat down again. She looked suddenly weary, it occurred to him—particularly the soft, gray eyes. She turned them up to him. They *were* weary. Compassion pricked him.

"I might have said anything, at that minute," she murmured. "I was so surprised. Forget it, please. Just promise not to look for it any further—you wouldn't be successful, anyway."

"Why wouldn't I?" he insisted. "Do you mean that—"

"I mean," she said, "that no matter how hard you try, you can't get hold of a copy of that magazine."

"Because—"

"Because—you just can't, that's all."

"How do you know?"

"That—I can't tell you."

"You asked me a moment ago to promise to drop the matter, if you remember," he said hesitatingly, after a pause. "Well, why? For your sake or—mine?" He laughed shortly. "Of course, the latter would seem quixotic, considering the length of our—"

She flushed, but answered bravely as she got up:

"Our—acquaintance—has been longer than you realize, Mr. Tarton," she said. "I *do* care—for your sake—no matter what you think. That is—the principal reason why I ask you—"

"What!" He was half-way round the table, but even as he started, she had slipped away. Regardless of amazed glances, he pursued her into the hall, just as the elevator door clicked mockingly. When he reached the street floor, *via* three flights of stairs, she had disappeared.

Slowly he toiled up again, and back into the quiet research library with its dim light, long tables, and rows of bent, silent figures. Rummaging the floor, he recovered the slip and carried it to the attendant.

"Are you sure," he inquired in his most ingratiating tone, "that this magazine is not on the shelves? I've known of errors being made—"

The sandy-haired curator looked at him twice and smiled curiously.

"I don't believe there's much chance of your finding that—here or anywhere else," he vouchsafed dryly. "*That's* no error—we know it too well."

"Why?" demanded Tarton. "What about it?"

Again the official eyes swept him appraisingly up and down.

"Well—" the officer perched on his desk corner and squinted mysteriously—"that book has been stolen out of here—that's why."

"But other libraries—surely—"

"What ones, for instance?"

"Why any of them—towns about here—"

"They've all been to us, looking for a spare one," he continued relishingly. "Theirs have been stole, too."

He got to his feet and waved his forefinger at Tarton.

"I don't think, mister, that it's possible to get a copy of that—anywhere. We've tried. It's out of print. The publishers haven't it, even. No library that I have ever heard of has kept its copy. All gone!"

"Well—I'll be—"

"Sure!" His palms separated expressively. "Just what I told you."

Tarton's fingers gripped his arm.

"Why? Why?" he demanded. "What's the trouble? What have they got against it? What's—what's in it?"

The other blinked at him.

"Damned 'f I know," he gurgled, as he turned away.

CHAPTER II.

ANSWERED.

TARTON spent about all the remainder of the day and a good share of the night chewing the thing over. In the end, it finished as it had begun—by being a flat poser.

It was easy to see that the girl herself

was above suspicion. A hundred things showed that. Yet she was hand in glove with a genuine thriller, if signs were worth anything.

Tarton really needed the article—needed it badly enough to do almost anything within reason to get it. And like the rest of us, he was equipped with a robust curiosity, not to mention a most vigorous fancy which, before morning, had mixed up his pretty girl in a thousand and one impossible scrapes.

By midnight he had reasoned it out. She was young, alone, defenseless. She had been drawn, one way or another, into something compromising. She needed help—courageous, discreet, masculine succor. No question about it. In the morning he would wait for her outside the library, take her for a little walk, explain his position, and insist on sharing her difficulties. Then, of course, she would tell him, and—

The idea comforted him so much that he fell asleep in the middle of working out the details.

He reached his post outside the great gray building exactly as he had planned, half an hour before opening time. And there he waited, with hourly trips inside to make sure she had not slipped by unnoticed, till luncheon time, and again from afternoon till dark—without a glimpse of her.

Up in the reading-room, her books were stacked neatly, waiting. Below on the sidewalk, Tarton strode up and down and chafed impatiently. Not that one day alone, but several—till he knew she would never come again.

On the afternoon when this conclusion finally established itself, he went back to his seat at the long table, but worked only a little. Most of his time he spent composing a brief notice that he wanted to make as definite and striking as possible—and the rest of it he invested in contemplation of a fascinating mental image that refused to yield to duty's call.

In the end he got the notice finished and off his chest, but the image stayed distractingly with him, as it had done for all the week past.

Springing up in torment at last, he gave up work for the day, and started off with

the advertisement down to the *Planet* office. It was going on the front page, extra heavy leaded. And for a week thereafter, Tarton was going luncheonless. But if it drew, it would be worth it—a thousandfold.

Before breakfast he dashed from his room down to the street and bought a copy. The ad jumped at him from the middle of the page. He read it through four times, half aloud, smiling a little more each time.

MAGAZINE OF ARCHEOLOGY

Volume 43, New Series

A liberal sum will be paid to the person or persons instrumental in bringing to the undersigned knowledge of the whereabouts of a copy of the above. Address *Planet*, XYZ 300.

Tarton grinned, put on his coat, and went down to the library—to waste six hours.

Two days later he got the answer. There was just this one—one only. It was typewritten, even to the signature and the address on the envelope:

If Mr. XYZ 300 would call at 497A Pearmain Court, he could see a copy of the magazine he wanted—provided he came alone, and after dark.

Tarton raised his eyebrows and exclaimed softly to himself. Alone and after dark! Shades of Jack Dalton! New York was civilized, it was gray and lonely and blasé and thrill-less. Yet here he was, being bidden after the fashion of Count von Horn to Peter Ruff! In the middle of his laugh, the picture of the girl's face when she had caught sight of the call slip flashed before him, and he sobered. Before leaving, he put on light, rubber-soled shoes, and slipped his automatic in his rear pocket.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE IN PEARMAIN COURT.

PEARMAIN STREET is of those thoroughfares that make you realize how foolish it is to call New York City the modern Babylon. The metropolis of Nebuchadnezzar at its wooziest never had anything to stack up against the East Side—least of all with that narrow, twisting,

maladorous, dingy, and crowded artery down which Tarton, after many inquiries, finally found himself shouldering a slow progress.

The court, an even blacker and more forbidding oblong, lay at one side of the street from which it opened off. It occurred to Tarton, as he paused in the lee of the corner block and peered down into its murky depths, that it was like a foul sore, a carbuncle, or an ulcer, festering out horribly from a diseased limb.

Unconsciously holding his breath, he started down, straining his eyes to see the numbers, and in the end obliged to bring his pocket flash into play.

The figures on the doors ran consecutively with those in the street, it appeared. No. 497A would be the last one on the side—down in the corner, probably. Stepping into the paved street to walk around a chattering crowd of natives who blocked the narrow sidewalk, Tarton came to it, ascended the steps, and pushed the button of his light.

At last! Dingy and tarnished, but correct, the figures lay before him. He snapped out the light and pulled the bronze handle at the right. Far within, a bell tinkled fretfully, then all was still. After a moment, muttering profanely, Tarton yanked it again, and listened intently.

This time the jangling was louder, and more insistently prolonged. But no one answered.

Stepping to the edge of the narrow porch and holding on to the door frame, Tarton leaned out to the right and peered in at the window.

Within, all was a black sepulcher, except for one tiny yellow sparkle of light that seemed to come a considerable distance, as if from a room far in the rear. It was so faint that it did not illuminate the inside of the house at all. And while he still looked at it, the thing went suddenly out.

Tarton swore softly and swung back in front of the door. Somebody was in the place. Why didn't he—or she answer? Instead of ringing again he tried the knob. It turned. The door swung softly in. Stepping, catlike, he stood in the hall, listening.

The place was pitch dark and utterly silent. Yet at the very moment of his entrance, before he had closed the outer door to shut out the racket and foul smells of Pearmain Court, he was conscious of a difference. For one thing, it was the rug under his feet. The fibers, he was sure, were long, soft and silky—probably a luxurious hand-woven Baluchistan or a Saruk. Then the atmosphere.

Every house has its special odor, a flavor absorbed from and characteristic of its furniture, its inhabitants, its food, its garments, its whole place in life. If one is clever enough, he can stand still, as Tarton was doing, and picture them all out—in pitch-black darkness.

Possibly Tarton wasn't clever enough to do a complete job, but he was instantly aware of the difference—of something quite otherwise from what he had expected. There were books about him, and some flowers. An excellent cigar had been smoked not long ago. Besides all of which, there was a tincture of something unrecognizable—an ethereal, slightly pungent smell, suggestive of nothing so much as a kind of Asiatic incense he had once noticed in an antique shop.

He took a step forward and pressed the button of his flash. The white halo showed him a somewhat long and narrow corridor with three or four closed doors opening off on either side. The one immediately at his left was ajar. He listened for a moment, and then hearing nothing, turned the light into the crack and followed it over the threshold.

It was an eery sensation, to be prowling about like this, burglarwise, in a strange house. Subconsciously he realized that he shouldn't do it; he ought to ring the bell again or pound on a door or do something to attract attention. But there was about the whole business such an air of grotesque adventure and unreality that it seemed quite natural to be left alone to blunder about and explore.

The room was a fairly large one, furnished with exceptional taste. The objects were not numerous, but as many as there were, of the best. A large round table, piled with books and papers, occupied the

center of the huge Oriental rug. A few fine pictures were on the walls, and among them were hung various curios of art, obviously of Far Eastern production.

Over the mantelpiece was a sword with a bronze blade and a hilt of gold inlaid with ivory. Below it several images, among which Tarton recognized the figures of some old Egyptian gods, were scattered about. More of these were lying in disorder on the table, on which Tarton saw also a cluster of flowers and a cigar stand, with the tray half filled with ashes.

But as he looked more closely, several curious features, one by one, stood out.

The flowers had been originally in a tall vase, but this was now overturned, and the blossoms scattered in disorder. The water from the vase had made a dark streak across the white table cover and was still dripping slowly from one of the corners to the floor. The tobacco stand was upset and several of the cigars had fallen off.

Not a single one of the small statues was on its feet. The table cover, instead of being smooth and square with the top, had been pulled far over to one side, wrinkled, gathered in a knot, in fact. Several of the books had been thrown off. Two chairs were lying on their backs. A corner of the rug was pulled awry.

Something like a shiver flitted down Tarton's spine as he took two more steps, paused, caught his breath, and went on. His senses were working rapidly, quivering-ly alert. Beyond that table, on the floor—

Unconsciously holding his breath, he walked quickly forward, turned the corner, and snapped the light down to his feet. But before he had done that, his toe stubbed gently against what lay there.

The man was stone dead.

His neck appeared to have been broken, for as he lay on his side, his head was twisted back and around till the face stared at Tarton from square over the left shoulder. It was a ghastly, mocking face, the eyes still open and distended, the tongue protruding.

His clothing was in order; no other signs of violence were visible. Only that terrible twisted neck and shocking grin.

Shuddering, his knees weak, Tarton made

a hasty examination. The man's garments were in good condition and of stylish cut. His linen was snowy white, his shoes of an expensive model and quite new. Obviously, he was of the upper world—like his house here, a rank paradox in the surrounding maze of slums.

Robbery had plainly not been the motive, for his watch and jeweled scarf-pin were in place, and from the inner pocket of his coat protruded the end of a black wallet. Yet he had been killed, fiendishly, in his own house, his neck wrung like a chicken's!

Tarton gripped his teeth together to keep them from chattering and started to retreat. His head was whirling. To come to this place in answer to a letter, to force his way illicitly in, to find it a house of refinement and luxurious equipment—for these parts a palace—and the proprietor murdered!

Fifteen minutes earlier, he would have plunged square into it—perhaps to be discovered, before he could get out, by a policeman. The light of the flash would have been clearly visible through the front window. Perhaps even now, before he could get out, the alarm had been given. Yet the situation was not without its grim humor. This was what had come of disregarding the girl's warning. And his magazine article! Gone for good!

He had put the table between himself and the ghastly thing that lay there, crossed the threshold into the hall, and was about to press the button of his flash to find the door knob, when, at something dimly but surely heard, he halted, palpitating and rigid. From somewhere behind him a door had squeaked softly as it was opened, and whispered voices conferred briefly and then ceased. Tarton faced them. The police!

Another pause, and footsteps crossed the floor. There was the scratching of a match, and a gas-jet flared out dazzlingly. A man stood beneath it, peering at him.

Tarton caught his breath. The fellow who faced him at perhaps twenty feet distance was an astonishing figure. He was beneath medium height, but tremendously broad and stocky, with a square, massive head like a lion's, out of which a pair of steel-blue eyes glowed ferociously.

The head was almost completely covered, except the mouth, nose, eyes, and forehead, with a perfect mane of tousled, matted iron-gray hair and beard, which materially increased the fellow's leonine aspect. His arms, Tarton noticed, as they hung by his sides, were very short, the hands immensely broad and powerful.

Altogether, he gave a tremendous impression of irresistible, concentrated, blind, brute force—a power which, the young man felt instinctively, he would not hesitate to use with utter ruthlessness, if occasion came.

For perhaps half a minute he glowered at the intruder without speaking, then took a step forward.

"Heh!" he grunted. "Who are you, coming in this way—alone, in darkness, without ringing? Without being admitted?"

His voice was deep and guttural, with a sort of raucous snarl to it. The accent was unmistakably hostile and just as certainly foreign, but of what nationality Tarton could not pretend to guess.

"I rang twice," said the young man. "Then I looked in and saw the light. I thought possibly they did not hear—"

"*They* did not hear!" interrupted the other. "Who did not? You mean I did not—suppose I didn't—suppose I did—that gave you a right to come in, eh? I know—you are a spy—a—a burglar! I am going to kill you! The law says a man can protect his house—"

"*Your* house!" blurted Tarton, and bit his tongue.

"My house—yes, why not? What do you mean, young man?"

The hairy man looked at Tarton more severely, blinking and coming several steps nearer.

"How long have you been in here?" he demanded.

Tarton could see suspicion leaping and growing in his eyes.

"Where have you been—what have you seen—eh?"

"Seen? Nothing. I just closed the door as you scratched the match. I haven't moved a step.

"And as for my being a burglar—per-

haps I ought not to have come in, but you—somebody here—asked me to call."

"Asked you to call?" cried the other. "You lie! No one is asked to come here. But you did come. You have been inside a long time. You have been seeing—too much. I shall—"

Tarton took the reply to his advertisement from his pocket and held it out.

"Look at that, then. I received it in answer to an advertisement. It asks me to call at 497A Pearmain Court. You can see for yourself. This is the number, isn't it?"

With a movement of pantherlike quickness, astonishing in view of his great bulk, the hairy man snatched the paper from his hand, and holding it close to the light, read it through. When he had finished, he crumpled it and thrust it into his pocket.

"Well!" he grunted. "So you're the fellow, are you? I remember. I did write that. I had forgotten. You're curious, it seems, about matters that don't concern you. Curiosity is dangerous. It has been the death of a good many men. If you—"

"Are you threatening me?" interrupted Tarton evenly. "Because if you are, I may as well tell you that I am armed, and I won't hesitate to—"

The big man burst out laughing loudly. Wave after wave of mirth swept over him. He gave himself up to it, bending half over in paroxysms of merriment, thwacking his great hams of hands down on his knees, and finally suddenly stopping to wipe the tears from his eyes.

"So you're suspicious, are you?" he bantered, suddenly swinging round to stab at Tarton with his brilliant, snakelike eyes. A loathsome expression played over his features. "You thought you were going into an evil neighborhood and you would protect yourself. You have an automatic under your coat in your rear pocket. If anything goes wrong you plan to use it. Good! Ha-ha! You are another young fool yet. If I wanted to harm you I could do it in a thousand ways so clever that neither you nor any one else would ever guess what had occurred to you—h-m—like that poor fool, D'Arcy, down at Wadi Halef—that I remember.

"But never mind. You advertised for,

a copy of a magazine. You offered a liberal reward. You wish to see it very particularly. There is something of utmost importance in it that you cannot do without. Why do you not apply to a library—to the publishers? There should be two or three dozen places at the least—”

“There *should* be—but there aren’t,” said Tarton, looking at him severely. “And the reason is peculiar—these places have lost their copies—through theft. They have all been stolen. Curious, isn’t it?”

The stout man’s piglike eyes flickered to the floor as Tarton spoke; then flashed up at him, twinkling shrewdly.

“Stolen!” he exclaimed. “All stolen, eh? Not a copy to be found!”

“Yes—did you take them?” Tarton said abruptly.

The man stiffened and his face hardened ominously.

“That was a foolish question, young man,” he answered. “Very foolish indeed. It shows that you have no discretion. For the third time to-night you prove your lack of judgment. You are not to be trusted. I will talk with you no longer. You have not told me how much you will give to see the magazine, but we will let that go. From your clothes I see that you are poor, and I will take nothing. Your conversation is also discourteous, but I will forget that, for I have promised. Come this way; I will show it to you; then you shall go. Come into my study.”

As he spoke, the man turned out the light, so that they were again in complete darkness. Tarton heard him turn and go scraping off to the right, calling over his shoulder: “Come this way. I will light a match.”

Tarton hesitated. Here was his chance to bolt. In a half second he could turn, cover the three steps to the door and be in the street. This fellow was a madman or worse. Whether he was the proprietor of the house or not, his terrible hands were unquestionably responsible for what lay there behind the half-open door. There was no doubt that he suspected Tarton of having been into the room and seen. It would be madness to go farther into that unknown house to put himself utterly into his power.

He hesitated, half turned, felt in his rear pocket for the automatic, and turned back.

Well down the corridor the tiny flame had blazed out, and by its light the burly figure turned the corner. Tarton took his hand out of his pocket and followed.

They traversed the length of the hall, passing more than one closed door, and finally entered a small room at its extreme end, whose door stood open. Here the host, closing it sharply, lighted a green-shaded drop light on the center table, and gruffly bade Tarton to be seated. Instead, he remained standing, peering about.

It was instantly evident that the place was exactly what the fellow had called it—a study. And a luxurious one, too.

On the floor was a magnificent, dark-red Oriental rug with silky fibers an inch long. The square table in its center was of mahogany, massive, beautiful with inlaid work. Rows on rows of books covered the four walls from floor to ceiling. In a corner a roll-top desk was littered with papers. In another a curious sort of statue at least five feet high, its base covered with weird figures carved in yellow and vermilion, reclined against the wall.

On the table were several queerly shaped ornaments of hand-beaten gold, also a paper cutter with ivory handle, a small long vase of alabaster with seven fluted sides, a miniature statue of a jade figure with the body of a man and the head of a ram.

Tarton bent nearer to examine it, but the harsh voice of the bearded man cut in on him.

“Here, young fellow,” he growled, “is what you wished; the Magazine of Archeology, volume forty-three, new series. There are twelve numbers. It will probably require some time to go through them and find what you wish. Sit down in that easy-chair and take your leisure. I am going out for a little—into the other room. I have some work to finish. When you get through, knock on that door and I will come and say good night to you.”

Without a word or a backward glance he had departed by the door on the opposite side of the room, leaving it open a few inches behind him.

After he had gone, Tarton sank numbly

into the leather easy chair, pulled the light over, and opened the first magazine. But the action was mechanical. He was far from being in the frame of mind to attend to the mysteries of Egyptian fetish-worship—that being the nature of the article he had been seeking, and for which he had wanted the papers.

His eyes strayed up and roved around the room. Books, books, books! Fine furniture, inwrought gold bric-à-brac, Oriental rugs, Egyptian statues, over there a painted mummy-case—a perfect scholar's den, sunken down in the ruck and smells of Pearmain Court!

And the master of it, who—as now seemed probable—was this terrific old man with his lion's hair and his serpent's eyes, his frowzy coat and baggy trousers, and his viselike, murdering hands—

Who, what then, was the other one, whose body still lay, doubtless, under the white table-cover in that front room—whose neck had been twisted like a chicken's?

As the full significance of the thing, and of his position, swept over Tarton, he sprang to his feet. It was impossible! It was frightful! He felt that he must dash from the house—he could not endure it a moment longer.

Then he slowly sank down again, gasping. It had occurred to him that it wouldn't do to leave so abruptly—he must at least glance at the magazines. It would prevent the fellow's suspicions from increasing. He might, after all, look at the piece he wanted for ten minutes or so—he ought to wait as long as that.

And accordingly his glance had returned to the volume, where his finger held it open.

That was the moment when he had gasped. And the reason was the warning that was stamped across both pages in purple ink:

THIS BOOK IS THE PROPERTY OF THE
———PUBLIC LIBRARY AND IS NOT
TO BE REMOVED THEREFROM FOR
ANY PURPOSE WHATSOEVER.

The words sprang out at him accusingly. One of the stolen books! One of those the girl had known of—and had told him not to try to see!

He threw it on the floor and picked up another. That was the same—from a different library. Feverishly he ran through the pile. Purloined, every one!

He remembered that the big man had taken them from a bookcase somewhere. His heart was racing as he got up, searched, and found it. There were more and more of them—so many that he gave up trying to count and fell back breathless.

It was quite evident what the truth of the matter was. In some way there had become published in that queer, dry-as-dust old periodical, an article objectionable—damaging, disastrous, rather, to this man. It was of first importance to him to get it, as far as possible, out of the way. Therefore he had gone from city to city and from town to town, gathering them in. Tarton had found the names of half a hundred places. And many more with no mark whatever on them. These, no doubt, were from private individuals—got by some trick or other.

Sitting on the floor before the bookcase, surrounded by the piles he had heaped up, Tarton ran through the pages of one of them. His curiosity was rampant. No matter what might happen in ten minutes, he would satisfy himself about this one thing, and see what it was. But he did not. There was nothing. Nothing that by the wildest fantasy of imagination could be twisted into facts either valuable, injurious or dangerous. Reports of committee, minutes of society proceedings, technical discussions, abstruse anthropological questions—the regular run of uninteresting fodder.

The book dropped from his fingers. Queer! He glanced round at the door. Still open. The house was quiet as a tomb. Perhaps the chap had skipped—gone off and left him. He smiled dryly at the idea. Well, anyway, there was the article he had wanted—his article. He might as well take a little while more and go through that. He would never have another chance!

He went over to the big chair, opened the book, and began to read.

The article was absorbingly interesting. It was just what he wanted—and much longer than he had supposed.

Without once looking up, he read it com-

pletely through, and then picking up a pad of blank paper that lay near him on the center table, began to peruse it again, making careful notes.

He had no idea how long he was taking. Minute after minute passed, stretching into hours. Still he read and wrote. He began to be drowsy. His eyes became painful, and under the strain of constant use, the bright gaslight seemed to be fading and the room growing dark.

With an effort he roused himself, sweeping a hand over his forehead, and stumbling to his feet. The room was certainly gloomy! Or was he asleep? He was so tired—so drowsy! The place was close and warm—no wonder. And with that curious perfumery so strong.

He lurched across toward the door he remembered having seen the man leave open, meaning to go through it and find some air. The corner of the table was in his way and he caromed round it. At last he reached the doorway and found the knob. It had blown shut while he was busy, and got latched—he twisted the knob, pushed, pulled, tugged in vain, and crumpled down inertly at the threshold.

CHAPTER IV.

AN OPEN WINDOW.

IT seemed an endless stretch of time before Bruce Tarton's senses glimmered back. Dreams he had at first—of hairy men being strangled by raging mummy cases, of mysterious dives full of beautiful furniture and flowers, where a tribe of great apes lived, pulling screaming girls from the public library about by the hair. Again and again frightful screams echoed through the fantasy. It was his library girl, he thought, calling him frantically by name to go to her.

He sat bolt upright, his head swimming and throbbing agonizedly, but his senses quivering alert. It had been a long time, he vaguely realized, since he had tried to open that door and fallen flat before it. The old man had drugged him. Was it yesterday, or a week ago?

He swept his hands about experimentally.

He was lying on a bed, fully dressed. After he had flopped, he had been brought up here. So much was clear, and it was also quite clear why he had been allowed to take his time going through those magazines—and why the secrets of the study had been so carelessly exposed. Some one has said: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." Well, how about a lot—like this? Tarton mused grimly. He had too much ever to see daylight again, that was sure.

He swung his feet over the edge to the floor, and made an attempt to stand. It was a rank failure. He crumpled to his knees and hands. Laboriously he pulled himself up by the bed and tried again, with the same result.

His knees were water, his head like the tympanum of a drum, throbbing at every heart-beat. Dejectedly he sank to the bed again. Then he lifted his head, startled. From somewhere a breath of cool air had struck his forehead, blown for a moment, then ceased. After a few seconds, another puff. A window was open somewhere in the room. Eagerly he faced it, dropped to the floor, and started wallowing over on hands and knees.

In two minutes he had reached the sill and crouched on the floor beneath, his chin on the cold woodwork, looking up at the yellow stars in the black sky, drinking in the crisp breeze in great gulps. It was a godsend, this! The fellow had been mighty careless to overlook it. Nothing else would have revived him; nothing else would have given him the strength that was now surging back, second by second.

Suddenly he started, thrilling with conviction. The thing hadn't been an accident! Of course the hairy man would have seen—or felt—the draft and closed it. The conclusion was immediate, irresistible—it had been opened afterward—by some one else—on purpose!

He sprang to his feet and crossed the room, weakness banished. Something had set him on fire. His blood was tingling. It was a girl's voice, crying out for mercy and for help. In the lonely pitch blackness of the place it was a tremendously blood-chilling thing. It sounded long-drawn

and hopeless, yet dull and mellow and half muffled from passing through many partitions and empty rooms. But it was horror-struck! The sort of sound, as the swift thought came to Tarton, that a girl would make with a hairy, apelike hand vising her chin—

He found the door, tried the knob, fell back, charged once, twice, in vain. The panels were strong, and locked on the outside.

Again the cry wailed out, frantic with terror. It was the voice he had heard in the dream—the one he had imagined was from his girl of the library.

A swarm of questions beat subconsciously on his brain as he fought with the door—how she came to be there, who she was, what was her connection with the stolen magazines whose contents he had found so innocent, but which she seemed to fear so much—and that not unreasonably, as it began to appear.

It all came over him in a flash as he stepped back, considering—what a crazily wild “Arabian Nights” fracas he had got snarled into! Yet it would be worth while, if he could but get out, and down there where she was, in time.

He ran over to the window and thrust his head out. It looked down on the back yard, three stories below, faintly aglow from the lighted panes of the other block, a stone’s throw opposite. Out here all was peaceful. Through an open window somewhere came the crooning of a harmonica and the strident quaver of a foreign voice in song. A burst of laughter from somewhere else. The clink of glasses and the rhythmic stamp of Slavic dancers. All around people were amusing themselves leisurely, as if nothing had happened, while down beneath him, in this house of astonishing events—

Leaning farther out, Tarton saw what had at first escaped him. It was the fire-escape, a narrow iron ladder fastened close to the brickwork to the right of the window. He scrambled to the sill and leaned out. The thing was in easy distance. He got a hand and foothold and swung over.

As he started clambering down it occurred to him that the thing probably didn’t

reach within ten feet of the ground. He would have to drop. Where—

He was passing the second-story window. There was a faint glimmer on the black pane, suggesting a light within, and, swinging over, one foot on the sill and a hand on the sash as he straddled empty space, he peered in.

The room was empty, but through the opposite open door he could see into the hall where a small gas flame was flickering. At the moment all was silent; then from somewhere beyond came the rasping voice of the man, pitched angrily, and mingling with it the girl’s.

Tarton thrilled. It *was* his girl! There was no mistaking at that distance. What on earth—what *could* it be?

The quarrel was waxing hotter again. Both voices were rising, his threateningly, hers pleadingly. Experimentally Tarton tried the sash. It was not locked, and swung up noiselessly. For a thoroughgoing bad man, the hairy customer certainly took big chances, he reflected, as he glided snakelike over the sill and sank to the floor. Suppose a Pinkerton was after him! This must be a very private matter, indeed, where outside interference was unthinkable.

Tarton stole to the hall door and peeked round the corner. They were across in the room to the right, whose door stood six inches open. He could hear them quite plainly, yet not a word could be understood. In a moment, comprehending the reason, he swore softly and scowled. They were using a foreign language, one full of queer vowels and soft guttural consonants.

Their tones had fallen again, and for the moment they were conversing softly, even pleasantly. He strained his ears to pick up a word, a single syllable by which he might characterize the tongue. But that, as he concluded in a moment, was quite useless. He was not enough of a linguist. Holding his place he waited, thinking.

There was a dead man in the room downstairs—unless the body had been removed, which wasn’t likely. The big fellow had killed him, without doubt. Equally doubtless the girl knew of it. Possibly she had stood in the doorway, watching, as the great thumb had forced his chin round and back

till the bone snapped with a final, horrid *snick!*

And now, at three o'clock in the morning—the dull tolling of a distant bell had just throbbed into his ears through the open window—they were having a conference in there. The rustling of papers showed that. Sometimes the rattling was soft, again loud, as if they had been snatched up violently by handfuls and tossed about. Between times there fell patches of silence broken by murmured scraps of conversation, exclamations, questions, and answers, as if the two were studying over some puzzle and suggesting things to each other—with a great tension of some sort hovering over them, and the strain growing, moment by moment, toward the snapping-point.

And she was the fresh-cheeked, warm-eyed little charmer, whom his eyes had watched for ten days, as she sat so near, buried in her great volumes, and whose blithe image had been, for nine of those ten, floating about in his dreams like a morsel of perfumed rainbow! The big man barked out what was unmistakably a ferocious, disappointed oath, flung back his chair, scrambled to his feet. There was a great crunching of paper. A torrent of rage poured from his mouth, and the girl, after one or two attempts to answer, fell into silence.

It was perhaps a minute or two that the fellow strode up and down, shouting and cursing and scolding. Then he stopped and snapped out something that apparently was diabolical. At the words the girl shrieked and sprang for the door.

At the sound Tarton had galvanically catapulted around his corner, across the hallway, and up to the threshold. Although he stood in plain sight, looking in, the two were so absorbed with each other that they did not notice him.

The man had intercepted the girl's rush and, one arm about her, was tugging her across to the bed. Sitting down, he pulled her to his side. Then he turned so as to half face her, and still holding her with his left arm proceeded to do something extraordinary with the right hand.

The ends of the last two fingers he pivoted on her shoulder. The thumb encircled the point of her chin. So, the hand

drawn out like a pianist's over a great octave, he paused and smiled. He murmured something in a soft and whimsical voice, and contracted his hand a trifle. Perhaps an inch her chin swung round.

Still smiling and still chatting, but with his eyes cold as the blue holes in icebergs, he kept on closing the vise. The girl's face had become white, her cries had died away to a parrotlike croaking, when Tarton, with a great shout, thawed from the horror that had been freezing him and plunged into the room. He had felt for his pistol and found it gone—naturally.

In the moment of surprise that his entrance produced, the man on the bed paused in his twisting process. His shaggy head came round, his piggish eyes gleamed into Tarton's and he smiled.

"So you got out," he said purringly. "I ought to have remembered that your gassing treatment was good only for three hours, but Zaida and I got absorbed in our little problem here and I forgot. But I have your pistol, and with your bare hands you cannot harm me. No one is strong enough—"

Tarton glanced desperately around. He must do something instantly. In a half second, a single twist more—

The room stood out before him with photographic vividness—the broad desk, littered with papers, piles and piles of them—and at what he saw on those papers his brain had a subconscious, prickling start—the books, the trinkets of statuary, and ancient jewelry, the piles of mounted photographs, the curious bronze sword over the mantel with its curved, massive blade and ivory handle.

He sprang toward it with a yell—vaguely he realized that it was wild and blood-curdling—a yell such as a primitive ape-man might have given forth when going into battle with a massive, grizzled bully who stood swaying and grinning fiendishly at the threshold of his home-cave.

Fingers tight about the ancient handle he whirled and rushed. The big fellow had sprung from the bed as he moved and met him more than half-way.

Tarton had a confused sensation as of charging into a steam-roller with bushy whiskers and bullish neck and shoulders,

and hands, whose touch was death—and closed his eyes and swung his sword.

At the same instant they met. The force of impact sent Tarton crashing on his back. The sword flew from his hands. Under the weight of the great body he was stamped clean of breath. Momentarily, as he imagined the fingers at his throat, he listened for the girl. Had she been killed? Would she—could she—come to the rescue?

CHAPTER V.

THE LIBRARY GIRL.

FOR a long moment he waited. Nothing happened. He had felt the arms knitting round him, then a hand brushed his shoulder, working toward the front. Madly he tore at it, and after an instant it had weakened and grown limp. He flung it away. The great carcass was motionless and soggy.

With an effort that took every ounce of his strength, Tarton twisted to his side, rolling it off. Groggily he sat up and peered at him.

The fellow was knocked out. From above the ear where the heavy saber had struck a glancing blow blood was trickling. There was a smear of it on Tarton's own cheek, which he felt and wiped off shudderingly. But the cut was not deep. In a short time, possibly only a few minutes, he would revive. Even as he looked the great hands twitched and a groan escaped.

Tarton got to his feet, weak and dizzy. He found, indeed, that he was obliged to hold on to the edge of the desk to keep from falling.

Over on the bed the girl was lying, white-faced, but breathing. She had fainted, he judged.

Through one of the doors that had opened on the hall he had seen, he recalled, the white sheen of porcelain. Staggering out he investigated. As he had suspected it was the bath-room. A white pitcher stood on the floor. Filling this with water he took it back and bathed her face and neck. Before long her eyes opened wonderingly.

"Where—where am I?" she whispered.

"You're all right," Tarton assured her. "I just made it, as you might say. That sword was more of a weapon than I imagined. But you'll have to hurry and brace up. I'm afraid he'll be on his feet before you are—"

Her eyes had been dull and uncomprehending, but at the mention of the man recollection swept into them and she sat up galvanically.

"Oh!" she cried, "I remember. He—he—"

"He had your chin," supplied Tarton grimly, "and in a second more he would have—"

"Don't—don't say it!" she screamed. "The thought of it—the very idea—" Suddenly, without a sign of warning, she threw her arms about his neck and buried her head on his shoulder, shuddering. It was clear that she was on the verge of complete nervous and physical collapse. Tarton glanced round. The hairy man was muttering and trying to sit up.

"We'd better get out of here, hadn't we?" Tarton suggested. He had gently disengaged her arms and stood up in front of her to hide from view the figure on the floor. "I'm afraid, in a minute or two, if we don't—"

With a display of nervous strength that astonished him, the girl sprang suddenly to her feet, clinging to his arm.

"Yes," she said, "we must go at once. If he gets up again nothing can stop him. I told him it was all over, that I would not do it any more. It has been months, and we couldn't find out. That was why he wanted to kill me. And he said I was responsible for your coming—and—and the other—"

"The man down-stairs," murmured Tarton, looking about. There was a tangle of things on the bed where she had been sitting—several of the papers such as littered the desk, that she had had in her hand when she had started for the door—her handkerchief, a gold pendant with a jewel in it. Mechanically Tarton scooped them up and put them in his pocket.

"You mean the man in the front room?" he prompted, leading her toward the door.

"Yes," she whispered. "He came a little

while before you did. Father was frightfully angry to see him—that was why we were hiding off down here. They had a terrible time, and then all at once, just as you rang, I heard that noise—of his neck—”

She chattered on and on, evidently relieved to talk, as they descended the stairs. Tarton had locked the chamber door on the outside and turned the key. He would have to break it open, he considered. But she was walking very weakly. Shaken as he was, he was bearing more than half of her weight. She had called the murderer “father”!

They were at the foot of the stairs, crossing the hall to the front door.

“My coat,” she objected, “and my hat. I can’t go out this way.”

Tarton listened. The knob turned under his hand.

“You hear him,” he whispered, “walking around up there. In a minute he’ll be through the door. We’d better not wait. If we do—”

Closing the door softly behind him he led her out onto the sidewalk.

Pearmain Court is not one of those spots of nature whose beauty is enhanced by solitude and dimness. Rather did its emptiness make more hideous the squalor of its front areas and ragged steps and dirty, curtainless windows. And the smell of its loathsomeness rose up by night, even as by day.

There was, nevertheless, one thing that made Tarton’s heart bound with relief as, with his arm tucked inside the girl’s, he paused on the curb and glanced about. It was that not a soul was in sight and that the corner arc had providentially gone dead, making the hundred-foot square court a blot of gloom. Turning to the right and hugging the house façades, they hurried off like cats.

It was perhaps the matter of two minutes to reach the corner. Once on Pearmain Street, where a pair of high-powered arcs on either side sifted out their powdery illumination and two or three rapidly moving figures, like puppets, broke the monotony of the stage, Tarton paused and looked back.

The house they had just left was swallowed up in gloom, but in the curious dead

quiet that flooded everything, he clearly heard, back in the darkness, the thud of a closing door and feet scuffling on the pavement.

“He’s come out—looking for us,” he murmured. “We’d better hurry. There’s probably a policeman—”

On second thought, however, as with a murmured word of acquiescence, she quickened her pace at his side, he was not so sure about that part of it. A policeman meant explanations and publicity, and, ten to one, imprisonment as material witnesses and a hundred other things to be avoided, if that were humanly possible.

On the other hand, what else? He stole a glance at her. She was coatless, hatless, dressed in some sort of light house frock. Her hair was tumbling about her ears, her blouse open deeply at the neck. A long gash split the filmy material over one shoulder and down the arm. Her cheeks were colorless and she swayed tipsily as she clung to him. What, he asked himself for the hundredth time, could he, a hall-room boarder, do with her, at almost four in the morning—except that?

Little did he imagine how quickly Fate was to answer that question—and how surprisingly.

After entering Pearmain Street, Tarton had doubled at each corner, first to the left, then to the right. Some of the doubles had taken them through dingy alleys, for which he was particularly thankful. Gradually he became confident that they had slipped into the open, out of danger. The sixth or seventh turn brought them out on a broad, well-lighted thoroughfare, with about the usual amount of early morning traffic. One or two stray taxis chevied by.

At the sudden apparition of a burly blue-uniformed personage, each had instinctively shied into a streak of shadow and held breath till the officer had paced heavily out of sight. He had peered hard into the darkness at them, but had gone, nevertheless, straight on without a waver. The next one, as Tarton well realized, might be more curious. Something would have to be done.

He looked down at the girl. For a long time she had tagged on, clinging blindly to him without uttering a word.

Apprehensive at something intangible that her silence had suddenly thrust into the situation, he leaned forward and peered sharply into her face. She was looking at the sidewalk and her cheeks were chalky white. He pressed her arm and began:

"Don't you think—"

Then he stopped suddenly. The library girl, without a sound, had slumped down into a little heap at his knees!

Lifting her shoulders, he turned her face up to the light, only to have it flop forward again heavily under his clumsy handling. She was breathing, he had seen, but with her eyes closed and completely unconscious. She had fainted.

Tarton stood erect and looked about. No one on earth ever had, at one moment, a less definite idea of what he was going to do than he; nor did any one, on the next, ever make up his mind and put his determination into action any more quickly.

For two things were approaching: from up the avenue the measured tread of another patrolman, who would unquestionably be impressed by the sight of a very pretty girl in white muslin lying in a heap on the middle of his beat at that hour of the day, with a distracted and equally hatless and coatless young man standing guard; and from the other direction the staccato rattle of an empty taxi racing garageward.

Tarton left his charge on the sidewalk and dashed out into the street. At the semaphore of his arm the machine slowed up and then rattled down to a standstill.

"Well?" demanded the driver over the fanfare of his engine.

Tarton waved his hand toward the rear.

"My—sister"—he explained—"has been taken sick. Coming from a dance. She was faint, and I took her out for a walk. How much to get us home?"

The driver, of wrinkled and knowing visage, grinned a leathery smile and expectorated over the hood.

"Too bad," he grunted. "Sisters is li'ble to git that way. I've saw 'em before. Where goin', mister?"

A lump popped into Tarton's throat and strangled him. Where—*was* he going? With the policeman almost there and the chauffeur waiting and grinning knowingly, and

the girl back there on the sidewalk—at four in the morning?

He hesitated, choked, began, stopped, and blurted out an address. At any rate it was two miles up-town. Before that she might be better.

"That's all right," said the chauffeur in a curiously softened tone that surprised him. "Better git her in here, if you're going to, friend. If that cop spots her, it's good night! I'll drive slow—"

A minute later they had carried her in and were off, with the officer, thumbs in his belt, surveying them severely from the gutter. True to his word, the chauffeur, after the initial dash out of danger's zone, had throttled down to a crawl.

Tarton twisted round to peer at her, tumbled in a heap at his side. She was huddled uncomfortably in a corner, her head on her knees. At each lurch of the cab she rolled back and forth, as if the next jolt would send her off.

Reaching forward he lifted her, and, with his arm around her, drew her head back to his shoulder. It nestled into the hollow of his neck, with strands of her hair tickling his cheek. Carefully he gathered them together and pushed them back so that he could look at her.

He wished her eyes had been open—but if they had been, he told himself, she would not have stayed there. There was a delicious, helpless surrender in the intimacy with which her soft figure lay against his. It was as though, after her terrors and hardships, she had given up—she was depending on him. As though she did it gladly, willingly, comforted to have his arm about her, holding her against the shocks.

He tried to imagine as he gazed into her slightly wan face, with its closed eyes and parted lips, what kind of secret she was carrying about that had made her the helper and the accomplice of this diabolical villain—her father! The thing brought him up with a shock. In the rush it had dropped out of his head. Her—father!

It was incredible! In the sweetness and refinement of her face—and he had feasted on it too much those ten days back there at the archeological table to be mistaken—there was nothing of the bestiality, the

simian, horrible cruelty and cunning of the hairy giant! Yet his helper she had certainly been—willingly. She had worked with him over something; she had stood by and seen the visitor murdered—she had gone from there to open the window of his prison room—far into the night they had conferred, and at the end she had come literally within an inch of that terrible fate—from which he had saved her.

A sudden movement startled him. He had become so engrossed in his thoughts that he had forgotten to keep watch of her. Her eyes opened and she started out of his arm.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "Where—what—what is happening, Mr. Tarton?"

"You fainted," he explained. "A policeman was coming. It wouldn't have done to have him speak to us. This taxi came along and—there was really nothing else to do, you see."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said:

"I see. But where are we going?"

Tarton hesitated.

"Well," he began, "it was rather difficult. I couldn't—"

The taxi stopped suddenly with screaming brakes, and the door was flung open from outside.

"Seventy-nine West a Hunnered an' Ten," croaked a voice from the box. "Six-ninety, mister."

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER COVER.

"**W**EST One Hundred and Ten!" exclaimed the girl, shrinking. "That's miles! You have brought me—"

"There was nothing else," argued Tarton, desperately. "I just told you. If that policeman had found us—you know what would have happened. And just then this car came along. It was the only hope. I had to tell him something."

"Of course," she murmured. "I shouldn't have said that. Is this your—"

"This is my house—I mean, where I board. I told the driver you were my sister."

"Oh! Then—"

"I think we'd better get out, if you feel strong enough. He's getting impatient. The noise of the engine may waken some one."

Out on the curbstone, under the corner arc, Tarton produced the solitary ten-spot that he fortunately hadn't exchanged for a pair of shoes or put in toward a suit or spent for any other of a hundred things, and mutely watched the driver's nimble fingers take all of it but three ten. Wordless, they waited while he swung into the street and drove off in a clatter and cloud of smoke.

Tarton turned to the girl.

"It's four thirty," he said, glancing at his watch. "In an hour Mrs. Contestable will be up. She has three early breakfasters—of whom I'm not one," he added, smiling slightly. "There are some chairs in the parlor that, while not downlike, are certainly softer than the pavement. We can sit down and wait. It won't seem very long after—"

She interrupted him impulsively, her hand on his arm.

"I'm afraid I ought not to—won't it be terribly hard for you to explain? This is a bachelor establishment—isn't it?"

"Well," admitted Tarton, "there aren't many ladies, but—"

"And your landlady is one of the very particular ones—"

Tarton smiled broadly.

"The house has an unimpeachable reputation—and I am perhaps the most spotless of its inhabitants. But that only makes it easier—"

"How?"

"Because she will believe anything I tell her. She knows nothing of me personally," he explained rapidly—"of my friends or family, I mean. You are my sister. You have been visiting acquaintances in—in the Bronx. I was there last evening. There was a dance. We went out for a stroll—lost our way in—er—the woods. You became ill—I took you into a drug-store till you recovered. Then, it being so late, you were nervous about returning to your friend's house—you begged me not to leave you—became hysterical and insisted that I take you home with me. And so to humor you—"

"And you think she will believe that—after living in New York City?"

"I know she will—she's got to," snapped Tarton. "Come! On second thought we won't wait for her in the parlor. We wouldn't, if you really were my sister. I'd take you up to my room, leave you to rest, with the door locked on the inside, while I alone bearded the lioness in her den. That's more plausible because it's more natural, and it's better for you because you can start in recuperating without hanging around an hour or two and going through that embarrassing explanation. You would probably give it away, anyhow." He slipped his arm under her elbow and steered her toward the steps. "It will be all right—don't worry—Zaida."

She started.

"You know—my name?" she murmured.

"I heard your—father—mention it. I think it's wonderful! Mine's Bruce. You ought to know your brother's name," he added, laughing whimsically.

The door had opened without a shiver, and they stood in the hall, once more treading on illicit ground, swallowed up in darkness and characteristic smells—quite different, it struck Tarton, from those of Zaida's house.

Shuffling with inch-steps he steered her toward the stairs.

"Third floor—back," he murmured with dry humor as they topped the second flight. "Sorry, but it's something—after all."

He started slightly, thrilled with sudden ecstatic joy at the silent pressure of her fingers on his arm.

"Indeed it's everything," she breathed. "You can't begin to realize what it means to me. I haven't a single place—to go! And just to think that you're doing this all, absolutely, in the dark!"

They had crossed the threshold of his little room, and the door clicked softly behind them. Tarton snapped a match and the gas-light blazed out. With scarcely a glance about at its modest, threadbare furnishings, she went on earnestly, knitting her fingers painfully together as she stood before him.

"You mustn't think I don't realize that you've had a perfectly terrible time," she

went on. "I can't help feeling that it was my fault. If I hadn't roused your curiosity by what I said about those dreadful magazines, you would never have advertised, and he would never have asked you there—all he wanted of you, you know, was to put you out of the way—"

"Why?" he interrupted. "What had I done? How was I dangerous to him?"

"You were interested in those papers," she answered in hushed tones. "You wanted to see them. That—nothing more—was enough."

"Yes, but why?" he insisted. "What is in them? What's at the bottom of it? Why did he kill—"

She raised her hand pleadingly.

"Please"—she begged—"not now. I really—I can't talk about it. To-morrow, perhaps. What I started to say was to tell you how perfectly splendid I think you have been to me—to do this when it makes everything so hard for you, and—and then what you did before, when you were almost—killed. If you hadn't been there he would have—oh, I can't express it—"

She was getting hysterical again, Tarton saw, as the overwrought nerves jangled at the memories she was bringing back. He put his arm about her and led her to a chair.

"Never mind," he soothed, "it's all right about me. I wasn't hurt. And as for your part, I would have died rather than not be there, Zaida." His voice was suddenly earnest. "And it's coming out all right—for both of us, I know. Don't explain now. Lie down and try to sleep. Here is the key. I'm going down. Later, toward noon, I'll send Mrs. Contestable. And you mustn't be afraid—she'll love you if you smile."

He had slipped the key into her fingers and gone out, closing the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTERRUPTED EXPLANATION.

AN hour and a half later, Tarton, having dealt a hand to Mrs. Contestable, who was fair, fat, better than forty, and Frenchly impressionable even after a quarter of

a century of Manhattan Island boarding-house management—and also one to himself, emerged from the game of bluff a distinct winner, and took himself happily out of the front door just as the sun kissed the tree-tops of the little park opposite the house.

Not far away he knew of a hotel where accommodations were *not* five dollars per. Thither he hastened, paid "in advance"—being touselled and baggageless—and in an hour, excitement and all notwithstanding, was fast asleep. While back in his third floor rear, the nervous, white-faced girl twisted and turned, longing for sleep and forgetfulness that would not come.

Below, between kitchen and dining-room, romance bit deeply into the heart of Mrs. C. After a time, unable to withstand it longer, she tiptoed up to Tarton's door and listened.

La petite was sick, he had said. *Bien*, she was trying to sleep. If so, well and good. But, if not, it was of a certainty she would be in need of something—a cold compress for the eyes—a cup of hot milk.

She heard the ancient bed-spring creaking, then a sigh. Calling out softly and reassuringly, she knocked. In a moment the door was unlocked by a pallid, sweet-faced girl whose cheeks were gashed with black creases that might have been done with charcoal, but whose hair was burnished gold, whose eyes were pure, and whose slightly timid smile was all sufficient.

So that when Tarton, eight hours later, having slumbered beyond all expectation, turned out confusedly, and having snatched a hurried bite, burst into his rooming-house, he was met in the hall by the landlady, who, with a smile, and her fat finger to her cheek, warned him that *la soeur* was still asleep, and to be quiet.

Some time later she got up and dressed. Mrs. Contestable put a luncheon on a tray, and Tarton took it up, sitting watching her and saying almost nothing as she ate.

When she had finished they looked at each other. He began lamely:

"You got rested—some, I hope?"

"Yes," she said. "I feel a different person. I must have behaved dreadfully last night, didn't I?"

"No. Not dreadfully, by any means. But you could have been excused, if you had. It is certainly horrible to think of—what you saw and went through." He leaned forward, his hand unconsciously clasping hers. "I want to help you—more than I can tell," he said earnestly. "But, of course, I know practically nothing. Could—do you think you can explain—a little? You might begin by telling me who the man was, and why—"

The girl looked up quickly. "He was Professor Fisher, the great archeologist—I rather thought you would recognize him, for, of course, you've seen him?"

Tarton shivered a trifle.

"Yes, I did fancy a resemblance. But, of course, it never occurred to me that it really was he. What happened between him and your—"

"He isn't truly my father," Zaida interrupted. "Only my stepfather. My mother married him after I had grown up. You see, he isn't really any relation. I'm rather surprised you didn't recognize him, too—Heldström, the geologist. Surely you've heard of him? He's famous."

"Heldström!" repeated Tarton wonderingly. "Of course I know him—but only as a name—as an author and a scientist. So you're Zaida Heldström—his stepdaughter!" He looked at her thoughtfully. "What a pretty name!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been all your life?" he demanded, suddenly laughing. "No one ever heard of you, did they?"

She smiled a little. "Don't talk like that—please," she begged. "You know we mustn't. I've got to tell you a lot—that isn't pleasant. Please don't interrupt."

"I won't," he promised. "But, first, before you get started, let me give you some things I found in my pocket this morning. I imagine they're yours. At any rate, they were scattered around on the bed down there—you left them when you got up, and, without thinking, I put them in my pocket.

"First, here are these papers with the notes of the inscription. You had evidently been studying—half a dozen of 'em. It was certainly a bad one, but you had it all wrong, anyway. Your handkerchief—which I'll show you to let you know where it is,

but which I'm going to keep." He held it up for her to see, and then, smiling, slipped it in his pocket. "And last, but by no means least, this interesting trinket. Pure Egyptian, dating from about the first dynasty, I should say. One of the finest hammered gold neck-ornaments that ever came out of a sepulcher—and that amazing jewel in the center, not to mention that microscopic scroll of hieroglyphics around it—"

Midway of his lecture he glanced at Zaida Heldström and stopped, thunder-struck.

She had given a cry of despair—more than that, of absolute terror, and her face had turned to ashes.

"My God!" she cried. "You got it! You brought it away! Oh, why did you? How did you manage to get hold of that fearful thing? I thought I was through with it at last. I was going to forget it! All my life I would never have to see it again, and now—"

With a desperate effort at control she pulled herself up and faced him steadily.

"Do you know," she said, "that that thing in your hands, or mine, or any one's, means death? Sure, inevitable, unescapable? It was that that killed five men at Karnak, and two more at Wadi Halef—and last night, right in our own house—"

Shuddering she broke down, sobbing wildly, her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the glare of the great yellow stone that, brighter than a diamond, flamed and blazed and cascaded with tawny light as it dangled from Tarton's hands.

Absent-mindedly, he dropped the ornament on the table, and, sitting down beside her, tried, with his arm about her shoulders, to calm her.

After a few moments she looked up, drying her cheeks.

"Please—go away for a little while," she whispered. "I must be alone. I have to think something out—at once. Come back in—an hour."

Without answering Tarton got up and went out. As he descended the stairs he heard the key snap softly. She had locked the door!

When he returned, in sixty minutes precisely, it was still locked. Calling, at first

softly, then louder with growing apprehension, and at last, shouting her name, he got no answer.

"I'm afraid something's the matter," he confided jerkily to Mrs. Contestable, who, aroused at the racket, came laboring up. "She's been hysterical, scarcely herself—full of queer notions. I'll have to break the door, I'm afraid." He looked at the Frenchwoman questioningly. His soul grew cold at what he knew he would see stretched on the bed.

"Go ahead!" she nodded. "*La pauvre petite!*"

But when, at the third shock, he splintered a panel, and went through—the room was empty. Zaida had gone. The fire-escape beyond the open window showed how. And the neck ornament of old Egypt, with its blazing stone, was also missing.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICTATED TERMS.

TARTON sank to the bed dismayed, while Mrs. Contestable, bustling about like a scared hen, filled the room with frantic exclamations.

"*Ma foi! Mon Dieu! La pauvre petite—où est elle allée?*"

Tarton twisted impatiently and scowled up at her.

"Where has she gone? That's easy—but what gets me is how I'm to—"

"You know—where she is at?" cried the woman, rushing over to grip his shoulder. "You know—and yet you sit there while the little one wanders, ill—"

"She isn't wandering. She has got there by this time. And she's either all right, or—"

Leaving the sentence enigmatically unfinished he reached for his hat and left the room.

His heart was heavy with foreboding. In a flash of inspiration he had suddenly understood it all—what that baleful jewel stood for between Heldström and the girl, why the study table had been snowed down with those curiously marked papers, why, the hairy man had tried to kill her; why, on discovery that he had the thing, Zaida

had tricked him and escaped. It was all too ghastly clear.

In the street he whistled up a newsboy and bought a copy of the extra—the seventy-third edition, it being then just four. On the front page the notice, just about as he had provisioned it, in staring black scare-head, with a cut below, jumped out at him:

PROF. FISHER DISAPPEARS

Noted Scientist Missing From Home Since
Yesterday

Standing stockstill, he read it through, even forgetting to pay the newsboy till the latter had twice hailed him—the hastily written, inaccurate, guesswork screed, full of conjecture, plans, and assurances, but nothing else. The professor had gone out, directly after dinner, presumably for a walk, and nothing more had been seen or heard of him.

It was thought that, being notoriously absent-minded, he might have wandered away to some friend's house and spent the night. His landlady—Fisher being single and relationless—was anxious, but as yet not alarmed, there being no reason why he should have experienced foul play, *et cetera*.

Tarton sniffed, folded the paper, and thrust it into his pocket.

Across the street the ubiquitous drug-store graced the corner. Tarton crossed and entered a telephone-booth. It was a considerably important number that he called—no less than police headquarters of the city of New York.

Of the female voice which answered he demanded speech with the commissioner. His name? Jones—Henry Jones. His business? Tell the commissioner that it was about a bomb plot he had just turned up. Immediate action—

A crisp male voice cut in.

"This is the commissioner. What do you want?"

"What I said about bombs was bluff, commissioner. I had to get you, personally, quick. It's the Fisher case—Professor Roger Fisher, you know, who disappeared?"

"I know. What about it?"

"He has been murdered."

"What?"

"I saw his body last night. I know where it is. I know who the murderer is. I—"

"Who are you? Where are you? What—"

"I'll be down," snapped Tarton. "Fifteen minutes." And having got what he wanted, he promptly hung up, dashed from the store, and sprinted after a passing trolley car.

Just a quarter of an hour later, having presented himself in the outer office, he was passed along with a celerity that, as he well knew, no other introduction would have secured him, and presently stood before the great man, in whose rear were posted, not conspicuously, but quite obviously, the stocky figures of two plain-clothes experts. Behind that inoffensive screen, also, the visitor could envisage the stenographers, lying there like spiders, in wait for his secrets.

Without pausing for the official to speak, Tarton came to the point.

"I'm the chap who telephoned just now about the Fisher case. Of course you want to know all about it, and about me, and then you probably plan to lock me up as a material witness. But before we start let me assure you that you'll do nothing of the sort."

The trim figure in the chair stiffened a trifle.

"Indeed, Mr. Jones—"

"Camouflage," interrupted the young man. "For the outside office. My right name's Bruce Tarton, student-graduate School of Science, Columbia University."

The commissioner tilted his eye-glasses up at him.

"That so! And lots of nerve, also. You say I can't lock you up if I want to. Please tell me why?"

"You misunderstood. I didn't say you couldn't lock me up. I said you couldn't find out all about this business and *then* lock me up."

"Ah! And again, why?"

"Because I won't say a word till I have your absolute promise—which your stenographers over there behind the screen will have some difficulty in leaving out of this conversation—as an official and a gentle-

man, to proceed about this matter as I direct."

"You won't say a word till I agree to do as you direct," repeated the commissioner with a smile. "I wonder, Mr. Bruce Tarton, if you have ever heard of the third degree?"

"It takes time. I could hold out quite a while. Meanwhile a second murder, more horrible than the first, will have been committed, and the man will have escaped. Indeed, this may have taken place already. It is because I want to prevent it, if possible, and because of the very delicate circumstances involved—which no one but I can thoroughly understand on such short notice—that I am asking you to make an unusual arrangement. Give me a man—"

"Give you a man! Send one with you, you mean—"

"It doesn't matter. I would have to tell him what to do, anyway—just one, and if this monster is still in New York, I'll get him for you. Otherwise—"

"Well, otherwise?"

Tarton shrugged.

"I've nothing more to say. You'll club me around, get nothing, send out your drag-net, and comb the town. As soon as this bird gets wind he cracks the girl's neck, too—always providing, as I told you, that he hasn't yet done it, or isn't at this very minute doing it while you are wasting time—"

"He—cracks her neck!" gasped the arm-chair man, sitting up incredulously. "What do you mean, man? You're crazy! What girl—"

"Don't ask questions, commissioner," interrupted Tarton. "I said he would crack her neck. That's what he did to Fisher. What he would have done to me if— The girl's his stepdaughter, commissioner, and I love her. I'm telling you the truth. It's the only way it can be managed. Please—"

There was a long moment while the chief hesitated. Then, beckoning over his shoulder, he summoned Detective Smith, thin-faced, keen, astute.

"You heard it all, Jake," he said. "I'm going to take the chance that this chap is straight and sober. Go with him and see what's in this. Try to do what he wants—

if he doesn't go too far. But use your head all the time—and get this man."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PICTURE MADNESS.

SMITH and Tarton, a half-hour later, found they were going to like each other. They were killing time down Broadway. Tarton had told the other all he knew about the case—how it had started, and everything up to the moment. They had decided to wait till dark—now not far away, since it was essential to make their entrance unobserved.

"I don't suppose you would trust me with a gun," remarked Tarton. "I had one last night, but Heldström took it. If we should get to close quarters—"

"I guess you'll do," smiled the detective, "but I don't, as a rule, carry two. Let's go back and get one." Which they did.

And some two hours later, bringing dusk and mystery to the purlieus of Pearlman Court, saw them gliding like shadows down the five-foot wide alley that opened into the back yard Tarton had looked down upon from his prison window. It was so dark that without their flashes they could not have seen the lower end of the fire-escape ladder.

Finally they came beneath it. Utter quiet reigned within.

"Here we are," whispered Tarton. "There's the end of that thing we've got to climb up—ten feet over our heads. Of course he may not be here."

Smith grunted.

"Well, if he isn't, it's up to you. I suppose you know that. This show's on your responsibility. Here, hold the light while I pitch up this rope."

It was a coil of small flexible cord that he pulled from his pocket.

"Flezzolo whip-cord," he grunted, casting it aloft. "Strong as steel. Ah!"

At the second throw the weighted end fell over an iron rung. Paying out the slack he lowered it till the ends met. He tied them together.

"I can climb up that," he smiled. "Can you?"

"Go ahead," said Tarton grimly. "I'll be there."

And in a minute more he was—with a pair of aching arms, lacerated palms and a scraped knee. Over his head the detective had ascended to the second-story window.

"It's probably open," whispered Tarton. "Try it."

"Yes."

"Go in and wait."

As they stood side by side in the empty chamber, where, less than twenty-four hours ago, Tarton had listened thrillingly to the quarrel in the other room, both were conscious of the difference.

"Nobody here," whispered the detective. "You can always tell when houses are empty. Something about 'em—"

"We'll look around," answered Tarton, "and then go down there to where Fisher was. I don't imagine he's been moved. And in that room around the corner there, there are a few things I want to look at—"

Smith gripped his arm.

"Some one coming," he cautioned.

Keys tinkled below. The front door opened, admitting a heavy tread. Presently a light sprang out, spreading a vague halo of radiance about the upper hall and across the threshold of the room.

The fellow was muttering to himself, ill-naturedly and disappointedly. Following his footsteps they could tell that he had gone into the front room. A match scratched. And then they knew that the professor's body was still there, for he burst out suddenly into a storm of raging and vituperation, cursing the dead enemy as though he were yet living.

A moment more and he came out again, slamming the door shut behind him and beginning to scuff heavily up the stairs.

"That's he," whispered Smith. "Now."

Tarton held his sleeve.

"Wait! I want to see."

Heldström had topped the stairs, turned sharply, and gone into the room on the right, the same where—

They heard him scratch a match, saw the light fan out on the floor, heard him grunt as he dropped into a chair—and then he was on his feet again, belching out rage with a flood of imprecations.

"Wait—till you hear what I have to tell you," cut in the voice of his stepdaughter in English. "I have been here three hours, waiting for you. I came back myself, because—"

"Because—because—" snarled the voice, "because you were afraid. You came to beg mercy. You are going to promise to help me, eh? The thing, where is it? Did that young fool take it away? I have been to his house just now—to get it. To break his neck, too, as I ought to have done last night. But he had gone out. Never mind. To-morrow will do. You—what did you say? Why did you come back?"

"Here it is—he took it by mistake. He did not know he had it. This morning he brought it to me, and I hurried back at once to give it to you."

"He has seen it then. Has he read it? Does he know how?"

"No. He did not understand about it. He thought it was just an ornament. He does not suspect anything. You do not need to be afraid of him."

"You forget—he saw in the room below. He does know. Besides, he wanted the magazines. There is no telling how much he is aware of. Every minute I wait is dangerous. As soon as I eat and get rested I am going back and wait for him. It must be to-night. And as for you—"

The girl's voice changed.

"Sit down," she begged. "I know you must be tired. I had forgotten. I will go and get your supper. In ten minutes you can have it. That will be time enough. Your coffee and your cakes and sausage, with strawberry jam, and the sweet pickles you are so fond of. At the threshold she turned and called back cheerily: "Lie down and get rested. I'll be right back."

As she crossed the hall the men in the shadow of the door corner had a glimpse of her face. To Tarton it was unrecognizable. Smith gasped.

"Hell! Did you see her eyes? And her mouth? It was half open. What's she up to?"

"Wait and see," said Tarton. "I've an idea—"

While she was gone the big man, like a chained elephant, was fussing about the

room. They could hear him, scuffling over the bare floor, pawing about the papers, muttering in perplexity under his breath.

"Nervous, isn't he?" said Smith. "What do you suppose is on his mind? He's got his gold thing back again."

Before Tarton could answer the girl had reappeared, crossing their field of vision with a loaded tray. She cleared a space on the desk and set it down. A chair scraped as the big man seated himself.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "How fine! Everything I like! You are a good girl, Zaida, after all. It is a pity that you know so much. I have been thinking. To-night I visit that inquisitive young upstart and square accounts. I get him out of the way. To-morrow I go back—back, back to the land I love, where the very air and the stones and the sand and sun belong to the souls of the departed that hover close above. I shall go to Karnak. Perhaps there I shall, after all, discover this answer which has balked us. If not I will stay there till I die. But, as I said, you have known all. It would be impossible to leave you here. I have been wondering what I could do. There is not much time, you see. I—"

With a roar of fury he broke off. As Smith and Tarton in their rush, turned the corner into the hall, they heard him plunge to his feet. The girl, with a single scream, had rushed for the door at his first move. Two of his strides overtook her. His arm shot out and jerked her back. The door, swung furiously, slammed shut and locked under their chins.

Unable to check their rush, they thudded against it, and as they stopped, involuntarily, paused to listen to what he was crying out on the other side.

"So that explains the beautiful luncheon! Poison—in the coffee! Strychin is bitter, girl. Didn't you know that? So you were going to save yourself, ah, while I—"

"It wasn't for myself," she cried. "It was for him—he had done nothing to harm you. It was for that, too, that I brought the emerald back. I—"

"Huh!" he snarled. "A love affair. Well, we will see. You shall both go. You now, he later. It is a pity to have spoiled that supper. Let me see—"

Smith thudded on the panels and looked at Tarton.

"It's solid," he snapped. "Can we smash it?"

"The minute he hears us," groaned the other, "he'll—that hellish hand of his—you know I told you how he does it. Takes about ten seconds—"

Inside Heldström was talking again.

"I shall not be cruel," he purred. "You remember the story of that prince of India who burned sweet incense before his enemies till they became insane with its mystic fragrance? I have something here—a chemical. I got it years ago, in Persia, from a Malay upstart of a king. It is equally powerful. I shall place you in a chair, tie you so that you will be obliged to keep still, close the windows tightly, place a pinch of it on this plate, light it, and withdraw.

"It will not kill you, Zaida. There is where I shall be more kind to you than you to me. But it will paint dreams for you, fill your mind with visions; it will show you, as realities, things your fancy never pictured. And at the end when it has burned out, you—you shall see—"

Tarton's face was horrified as he turned to Smith.

"God!" he murmured. "What *will* we do? If we try to get in he'll do the other—" Smith was smiling.

"Don't forget what he said—he'll come out—in a hurry. When he does—"

Tarton nodded.

For five minutes there was comparative quiet in the room. The little struggle that marked the capture and tying of the girl they did not hear through the thick wood. A tiny shriek or two, a grunt, was all. Smith, sniffing at the keyhole, got a sharp odor.

"In a minute now," he breathed, and stood to one side. Tarton was at the other.

Suddenly the lock clicked; a vertical wedge of light appeared and broadened. The huge figure of the Norwegian bulked on the threshold. Pausing, he half turned and glanced back with an ironical word of farewell.

Tarton, from the left, stepped forward. His clubbed pistol rose and fell—once, thud—dingly, sufficiently. The great figure way-

ered, toppled, crashed, face downward, back into the room.

Throwing the legs to one side, and clearing the passageway, they rushed in.

Zaida, tied hand and foot in a chair, occupied the middle of the room. On the desk the powder glowed and smoked whitishly. The air was fetid with its deadly, pungent odor.

Tarton, in the lead, seized the girl, chair and all, and, with Smith helping, rushed her out. In the empty room, before the open window, they set her down and untied her. And ten minutes later, when her senses glimmered back, it was to find, mysteriously sitting at her side, some one whose arm gently supported her, and whose shoulder pillowed her head. Startled, she looked round; then, with a sigh, happily closed her eyes. This, she was sure, was the first of the visions.

Smith had gone in to see about Heldström.

"He's still out," he reported on returning.

Five minutes later he went again. This time he stayed. A voice broke out, at first softly, then more loudly. It spoke no sense. It addressed no one. Gradually it swelled to fury. It was the Norwegian's. There was something strange about it.

Tarton sprang to his feet. At the threshold he found Smith, automatic in hand, white-faced and shuddering. Wordless, he pointed in at the opposite corner.

"It got him," he whispered awesomely, "while he was out."

Heldström, disheveled, hollow-eyed and white, stood staring into space. He reeled as though intoxicated; his great arms beat the air about his head like flails. He was talking, arguing, defying, cursing, pleading, weeping, screaming, first with anger, then with terror. He was haranguing the visions—the diabolical personages of furious imagination that the drug had conjured up. They were all about him—a hundred horrible shapes and sounds, that he fought at and defied with all his might. He called them by name—he pleaded with them, cajoled and promised them. Perspiration flowed from his forehead. His struggles grew feebler, his voice hoarse and broken. Still he battled desperately on.

Tarton felt a tug at his sleeve. It was Zaida, who had come creeping out in fright and loneliness. She clung to him, gasping.

"Do you know—anything about this?" he whispered.

"He told me," she breathed. "First you see these terrible visions. The room is full of dreadful creatures that threaten you. Then afterward you fall asleep, and when you awake you are—insane. It is incurable—oh, look!"

Heldström had suddenly stopped talking. His tongue ran round his lips, moistening them. His hand dropped to his side. He wavered, staggered, collapsed to the floor, breathing heavily. He had seen the vision, and fallen into the slumber.

Two hours later, when he awoke, a strait-jacket was about him. Nevertheless, it required four men to take him away to the asylum.

CHAPTER X.

THE MESSAGE OF KING T'ATH-MESSU.

"WELL, it all began when my stepfather met Professor Fisher in Egypt," said Zaida Heldström. She was sitting by Tarton's side on a rock. There were rocks on the steep bank that towered above them and rocks on the slope that fell away below. And to the right and left. But in front was only the solitude of the open sea, with a canopy of cotton clouds on turquoise sky.

They had taken the day and gone to land's end. The world is full of land's ends when you are in love. Love gives you an instinct where to find quiet places, undisturbed except by soft breezes and the song of birds. They had brought their luncheon and eaten it in this wilderness of boulders and sky, and at last Zaida had begun to explain.

"The professor, as you of course know, has spent most of his life digging up buried cities in Egypt. He has discovered some wonderful things. And he's written books and books about it.

"My stepfather had been traveling about in Persia and Afghanistan and Turkestan, and all those dreadful places, for years. I think it was the hardships he went through

there that began to affect his mind. Anyway, coming back, he went to Egypt, and he and the professor met somewhere in one of those old towns a hundred feet underground, and became great friends.

"Professor Fisher had just started exploring a city much more deeply buried than any that have ever been found before. Mr. Heldström stayed and helped him. After a while they came to an old cemetery full of wonderful tombs. The people buried there must have all been kings, for the burial-chambers were very large, and cut out of solid rock. And they were all provided with furniture and food and figures of servants and ornaments—"

"For the use of the soul after it had left the body," put in Tarton. "They were ever so much more careful of people after they died than while they were alive."

"Yes. Wasn't it strange? And then the tomb of this princess, the most wonderful of all—"

"Hata-seps'u," smiled Tarton.

"What!" exclaimed Zaida. "How did you guess? You knew!"

"Never mind—just now," he laughed. "I'll tell you pretty soon. Go on with the story."

"Her father had left her some wonderful things—gold dishes and vases and pots for the queer face paint they used, and books and books written on papyrus. But the most splendid was this."

The girl's fingers rose to her throat, where the great jewel, in its setting of dull, hammered gold, hung on its slender chain.

"They found it around her neck—around the neck of the mummy." She shivered a little. "She was a beauty, this Hata-seps'u, if that was her name, as you say. Her portrait was on the outside of the wrapping, you know."

"After they had unwrapped her, Professor Fisher took it off and looked at it under his magnifying-glass. Then all at once he began to get excited. He ran up out of the tomb and went to his tent and shut himself in. After a while he came out, all wrought up. He was so full of it he couldn't keep still. My stepfather had no trouble, I guess, in getting the story out of him."

"It seems that thousands of years ago, there was one jewel the Egyptians were passionately fond of—the emerald. It never seemed a very beautiful stone to me, but my stepfather has told me that perfect stones have always been harder to get and more valuable than even rubies or diamonds. The Egyptians thought they were charms against sickness and evil spirits, and wore them next the skin whenever they could. Sometimes they swallowed them to cure certain diseases."

"The best stones in Egypt came from the Cleopatra Mines in the extreme southern part of the valley. But after a while they were worked out and no more stones could be got. Then, after that, of course the value increased rapidly, and only the very richest could afford them."

"There has been a story floating around—sometimes explorers would find references to it on inscriptions or in their books—of a mine where enormous, perfect stones were found years and years before the Cleopatra Mine was discovered. It was somewhere near an old abandoned city, which had once been very splendid and wealthy, and the stones had belonged to the king and his family only. But these emeralds, instead of being green, were yellow. They were larger than your thumb, some of them, brighter than diamonds, more brilliant than the sun. Each one was worth a nation's ransom."

"Of course, everybody—all the archeologists, I mean, like Professor Fisher and his friends, just thought it was a story, without any truth in it. So you can imagine how it astonished him to find one of them right around that dead princess's neck, just as it had been hung there, more than six thousand years ago!"

Zaida Heldström's fingers reached back to the tiny clasp and unfastened it. The magnificent thing dropped into her lap, and lay there, scintillating and glowing as if alive.

Tarton picked it up.

"And then around the stone, engraved in this spiral on the flat gold mounting—"

"That was it," she interrupted him excitedly. "Professor Fisher showed it to my stepfather. As it is, you think it's nothing but scratches, but under a lens—"

"Under a lens," repeated Tarton, draw-

ing a small, rubber-mounted one from his pocket.

"It's an inscription in old, old writing, telling the location of the mine. Old T'ath-Messu, the king, her father, put it there."

"So that when the soul returned after the eternal cycle, and the body lived once more, it could be found."

"I suppose so. But Professor Fisher, of course, could read it. He had already deciphered half of it when he came out of the tent and met my stepfather. He told him what he had found out so far. It had been all introductory. The directions hadn't come yet, but the mine had been mentioned. He knew it was about that.

"Well, you can guess the rest. That night, Heldström got into the professor's tent, and stole it. Before daylight he was miles away. The professor followed him. Heldström beat him at Cairo, got a steamer home within an hour. Fisher came on the next one.

"All the way over my stepfather tried to finish reading the inscription, but he didn't know hieroglyphics—only a smattering that he had picked up. And this one is very difficult.

"As soon as the professor got to New York he got detectives looking for my stepfather. So he couldn't venture out at all, because, of course, his strange appearance made him a marked man. He would have been arrested in a minute.

"After my father died and my mother married Mr. Heldström I left home, and went to work as a stenographer. In a year my mother also died and my stepfather went away. That was the last I heard of him till I got a letter asking me to call at the house in Pearmain Court, where he had had his things moved secretly, and where he was hiding.

"He told me about the jewel and the inscription—but not the whole story at first, of course—and wanted me to help him by going to the library, getting their books on Egypt, and studying the old hieroglyphic writing. Evenings I would show him what I had learned, and we would try to finish reading the inscription, which he had copied out in large characters on a big sheet of paper.

"But I never could seem to get it right or else he couldn't understand what I told him. He used to get frightfully angry, and would rage and curse at me. Finally I got frightened. One day I told him I would have to stop. I couldn't do it any more.

"He flew into a perfect fury at that, and threatened to kill me. He told me how some one in Persia had taught him to use his terrible hands the way you saw. He said he had killed men in Egypt for refusing to do as he wished. So I had to keep on, although now that I had found out all about him I felt as though I were a criminal, too. But what could I do? And of course I had to give up all my friends, and I used to get so lonely, day after day."

"What about the magazines?" put in Tarton gently. His arm was around her, but neither knew when it had got there.

"Oh, I forgot. Two or three years before some one had written an article about emeralds for the Archeological Magazine, and in it had told about the Cleopatra Mines, and also about the story of this lost mine of yellow ones—how scientists were interested in it and might some day discover it. So—he found out about the article, and because he was afraid that some one else might get interested and get ahead of him in some way, he—he made me go around from place to place, and—and—"

"I see," murmured Tarton. "But there wasn't anything about emeralds in those I looked at."

"He tore all those pages out and burned them. His mind was going, you see."

Tarton nodded.

"That is all, I think," murmured Zaida Heldström after a moment. "You know the rest."

"I suppose Professor Fisher stumbled in accidentally that night?"

"No—he found out where we were living and actually had the courage to come, alone, and demand the emerald."

"Has he any relatives?" asked Tarton.

"You mean—I ought to give it to them?" she said quickly. "I thought of that, but I find he hasn't. He was a man who lived alone, it seems."

"Then—it's yours, isn't it?" smiled the young man. Just then the sun struck it,

sending up a blinding glow. "The only one in the world—the great yellow emerald of Princess Hata-seps'u, daughter of King T'ath-Messu, master of ten thousand times ten thousand—come down to you after six thousand years!"

Slipping her finger into his palm, she glanced up, smiling ruefully.

"Yes, but I don't know what it says. There's a message there—from that old king. I'd like to know what he says to us—to her and me. Perhaps even the mine could be found if I could only read—that—"

Tarton picked up the relic and produced his magnifying-glass.

"I've spent a great deal of my life uselessly," he said. "I'm convinced of it. I've been wasting months away among dry and dusty books when I ought to have been learning how to earn bushels of gold dollars for you. But here is where I can help.

"Egypt has been my hobby. I've studied their hieroglyphic writing just for fun. I saw that inscription on there and read it that first morning before I went to bed. It isn't very hard—just listen—"

"Oh, Bruce!" she cried. "You don't really mean you knew it all the time—"

But Bruce Tarton was reading. He was reading out a curious message—one scratched on that dull gold eons and eons before by a swart-faced scribe in some tall-columned temple by the lazy Nile—to be held there while kingdoms rose and fell, and nations came and passed away, and centuries flitted by—then to be translated, on a piping August afternoon, half-way round the globe, to a slender girl who hovered, starry-eyed, at the shoulder of her young American. What would the souls of King T'ath-Messu and his Princess Hata-seps'u have said if they had known and hovered overhead?

Tarton, too, was a little white and his voice unsteady as he began. He could not keep the romance of it out of his throat:

"Saith the king, T'ath-Messu, mighty in wrath, beloved of the gods, conqueror of Kadesh and Patun and Punt, to whom all nations come bowing, like grasshoppers in summer for multitude; saith he unto his

beloved, Hata-seps'u, the princess, the dark-eyed, his daughter: Kadesh shall be thine, thine shall be Punt, the rich land favored of Ra, the sun-god; and therein shall the city of yellow stones be thine, Amenterah, the cavern of yellow jewels, and the mines thereof, deep-dug in the boweled earth, far beneath the bosom of Hathor, the cow-goddess. Lying beneath the paws of the sphinx are they, at the entrance to the underworld—the fifth sphinx in the avenue of sphinxes that guard the way before the temple of Hathor. When the sun-god, Aten, shines bright in the heavens, so that he gleams in the eye of the sphinx, the eye that is a yellow, gleaming jewel, press ye there for to discover the key, the one key that openeth the treasure, the secret mines of yellow stones beneath the temple of Hathor; to whom entrusteth T'ath-Messu, the king, his daughter, his beloved, Hata-seps'u. It is said."

"The temple of Hathor, in the city of Amenterah, in the land of Punt—" It was the girl's voice, hushed in awe as she gazed up at Tarton. "Under the sphinx—between his paws, it says. Where—where is—where was this city—of the yellow jewels, Bruce? Have you ever heard of it?"

He shook his head.

"This inscription is very old. It belongs to the time of one of the earliest kings. He and his daughter were dead and buried, thousands of years, probably, before Moses looked out over the Red Sea. And the land of Punt—it may be anywhere. I have never heard of it. The sphinxes that guard the temple of Hathor, the cow-headed goddess, are under hundreds of feet of drifting sand. You will never see them, Zaida—no one ever will. They belong to the past—the dim, everlasting, wonderful past that goes back years and years forever."

Tears sprang into her eyes as she looked up at him.

"Then—"

"Then this is all of King T'ath-Messu that you will ever have," he smiled, "and you will be the only woman alive, Zaida, who has a yellow emerald!"

"And I'll be the only woman alive, too, who has you, Bruce," she whispered as she turned to him and her arms crept round his neck. The yellow emerald of Hata-seps'u slipped from her lap, unnoticed, as she lifted her lips to his.

(The End.)

Blackstone Shingles

by Edward Walton



I.

AT the completion of his law studies, and his admission to the bar of the Empire State, young Evan Todd had never put in concise words his formula of living. He had not mentally matured sufficiently to frame as a tenet that which he followed through instinct. However, the formula was this:

“Lean until you can stand.”

He graduated from Urbanus University, which had a curriculum of wide range. You could select an idealistic course—or a practical one, and thereafter get along.

Evan Todd had chosen to study law.

He had been reared from childhood, and put through college, by a doting old aunt of Palmyrus. After commencement he wrote her of a plan he had formed. Old Aunt Letitia, a withered string-bean of a woman, read the letter with resigned dismay. She had supposed Evan would be qualified to return to Palmyrus, and hang out his shingle, right after graduation.

With the call from the son of her dead sister, however, she set about plans to maintain him elsewhere for two more years. She hypnotized the hens into laying more eggs; she took in a few family washings; she ached with the extra work of caring for a pair of boarders.

Meanwhile, Evan studied law in the office of Hannibal Hoyt, in the town of Bucephalus, within easy trolley distance of Urbanus

and its fine consulting library. However, he studied Hannibal more.

The day after he was notified that he had been admitted to the bar he was cruelly shocked to receive a telegram from his aunt's physician announcing her sudden death. “Heart failure; worn out,” was the laconic reason given.

Evan Todd remained a day longer in Bucephalus, to accustom himself to his grief, gather his effects, and take leave of old Hannibal Hoyt, whose visage was vaguely remindful of a sea lion's with white whiskers. Then he returned to Palmyrus, where he had received his earlier education, in time to attend his aunt's funeral as chief mourner.

Coming back from the grave in the old cemetery where were twittering the first robins of spring, Evan, as his aunt's only relative, sat in the parlor hearing the will read by Erasmus Hawkins, Palmyrus's only lawyer.

Old Hawkins's voice cackled with the cracked timbre of nearly eighty years. A lance of May sunlight flashed through the window and searched out appointments of the late seventies. Also it accentuated the dull-green luster of Attorney Hawkins's Sunday frock coat, that was once of rusty black.

During the reading young Evan Todd's large, pale-blue eyes protruded the more. Long, slender fingers clawed at the sparse tow hair that had been decorously plastered

for the obsequies. His attenuated blond nose, somewhat pimpled, twitched like a rabbit's.

Wailed his high-pitched, reedy voice: "Did I understand you correctly? Just this cottage and two hundred dollars in cash? I thought aunt would leave at least two thousand dollars!"

"Just two hundred, after subtracting the amount she set aside for her funeral expenses. Keeping you at Bucephalus cost a lot, and she had to eke out with contriving and work at that."

There was nothing of disapproval in the words. It was a concrete statement of dry fact, made by a man old and dried and finished with human emotions.

"What charges have you got outstanding against the estate?"

Now into Todd's speech had crept a subtle note of aggression. It was the more or less noble note—depending upon circumstances—of the man who is willing to fight for his own.

"Your aunt settled with me recently."

With sudden cordiality Todd pressed upon Hawkins a glass of his aunt's elderberry wine and guided his aging steps to the door.

With cautionary vision of his peculiar youth he had already decided what to do. The jangling arenas of Buffalo, Rochester, New York—these brawling metropolii all looked fearsomely alike to him—did not appeal to him.

He resolved to settle in Palmyrus and set up bachelor quarters in the cottage now his own. He would move a massive desk and some other heavy furniture in the attic into the parlor and transform it into an office. There he would do business and save rent.

That was far better than risking a dive into unknown waters. At first it was more prudent to wade. Moreover, careful use of his aunt's money had taught him the value of economy.

True, he must secure business, and Palmyrus was a peaceful burg. The briefless days of old Hawkins attested this. But Hawkins belonged to the old order, which must inevitably give place unto the new.

Besides, there was Hannibal Hoyt, of

Bucephalus. There was an old fox for an aspiring cub of the law to pattern after.

So he set about his preparations. One of his aunt's boarders had left just before she died. The other he retained as a roomer, and they went "fifty-fifty" on the cost of a bachelor's table. Walter Sims was bookkeeper and cashier at the coal-yard. As he was also of a saving disposition, there occurred no trouble between them over the scrawny marketing done by Todd. Evan saw Sims only at meal times, as the bookkeeper was socially inclined throughout the village.

Within a week the prim little parlor in the cottage on Main Street, two blocks below the post-office, was ready. The new businesslike air was helped out by the framed diplomas and fire-insurance calendar upon the wall and a second-hand typewriter that Evan had bought in Bucephalus.

Over the front door he hung his "shingle" that announced that he was Evan Todd, attorney at law.

Passed the sweet-odored weeks of spring-time, bringing closer the tintinnabulating summer for Palmyrus. This was the fourth season of a change that was adding to the prosperity and the ambition of the folk of the quaint old village. The construction of new State roads had suddenly made of the place, set picturesquely among hills, vales, and lakes, a favored summer resort.

For many days now Evan Todd's latch-string had swung, but no client had appeared. The young man was growing anxious. Slender as was the "outgo," there must be some income. He had spent most of what money he had brought from Bucephalus, though he had not yet been obliged to dip into the two hundred dollars his aunt had left him with the cottage.

The scented air outside was filled with the staccato sounds of progress, the ring of hammers wielded by brawny hands, for Palmyrus was by way of being enlarged. Evan resented being outside the glow of prosperity; he yearned to get his.

He sat in his office one sunny day pondering how to create some business. He must not follow in the profitless steps of old Lawyer Hawkins. There was too much absence of contention in Palmyrus. Were

all communities like it, the lawyers would starve!

Then the door opened, and in walked—his first client.

"Hello, Evan," drawled a lazy, rather pleasant voice that he remembered. "Come to locate amongst us, I take it?"

"Yes. How do you do, Silas?" greeted Todd, and waved his caller to a chair.

Silas Weeks sat staring about amiably.

"Pretty well fixed up here now, ain't ye, Evan?" he commented. "Well, we need a new lawyer here, I s'pose. This is a peaceable place, but it's due to spread out, an' that 'll make growin' pains. Them's liable to set us a quarrelin'."

He smiled a dry smile.

"We need a new lawyer here, I s'pose," he reiterated. "Poor old Hawkins is gettin' sort o' spavined; he won't never hike over to the county-seat no more. I don't have much law business; folks is pretty well satisfied with what I do for 'em. But I've brung a couple o' papers to draw up, an' what business I have I'll throw your way."

"Thanks, Silas," acknowledged Evan, while twinging with keen disappointment. "A couple of papers to draw up," and he had hoped, at the least, that Weeks had called to start a lawsuit, with an accompanying fat retainer.

He studied Weeks as the caller in overalls—he was still on the right side of thirty—gazed placidly at the diplomas upon the walls. Just now Weeks was the busiest man in Palmyrus, and prospering faster, as for three seasons. Of this good fortune for Silas Evan had heard.

Watching him stealthily—a habit of his—Evan's memory recalled previous years, while through the open window the banging of hammers upon the shingles, walls, window-frames and elsewhere upon additions to various houses in the neighborhood attested the steady growth of Weeks's bank-roll.

Todd had known "Sile" Weeks as one of the older boys at school. Weeks had interfered when certain of his fellows had "picked on" Evans for being a "nanny." This Weeks had done from motives of rare chivalry, declaring that nannies should be protected.

So a certain bond of sympathy existed between this pair, though it is doubtful if either of them recognized it for that. Weeks had forgotten that Todd had been a nanny, and saw in him now only a new, full-fledged lawyer, theoretically more up-to-date than the superannuated Hawkins for the trans-action of what little legal business Weeks had to be done. While Todd, far from recalling with gratitude that the stalwart Silas had preserved him from chastisement, remembered only that he had accepted the verdict that the smaller boy was a nanny.

Now furtively watching Weeks, the beginnings of a cunning plan began to stir in the brain of the young man who had studied law and by-products in the office of old Hannibal Hoyt, of Bucephalus.

Weeks's glance shifted back to the skim-milk blond visage of Evan Todd, who contrived not to look guilty. He drew up his chair to the desk and produced some memoranda from an inner vest-pocket.

"About them papers," he drawled, and began to explain what he wanted.

As he worked at his typewriter, filling in a pair of blank forms, Todd's mind continued busy with memories of the past and of a plan for the future, still nebulous.

He recalled that at twenty Weeks had married Nettie Dalzell, one of the grammar-school teachers and of his own age. She was black-eyed, shrewd, snappy, and in the vernacular, an all-fired good looker. Now, with their excellent luck, while Silas made the money, she conserved it.

While he was attending the academy, though she was a little older than he, Evan Todd had tried to "shine up" to Nettie Dalzell. After all these years he was conscious of a flare in his blood when he recalled with what cool contempt she had discouraged his advances. It had at the same time angered him, and, through some craven streak in the man, attracted him the more. But he had never had from her a glance of friendship.

Silas Weeks's chance had come with that of the village. His father, who had died three years previously, had been only the village carpenter. In that trade he had trained his son, who had succeeded him as an "institution." Now he had, through

chance, flowered as a contractor and builder and directed the summer jobs in Palmyrus done by carpenters he imported from the nearest cities. In this ambitious new line his wife was his "right-hand man."

Weeks made a quietly forceful figure as he sat beside Evan Todd's desk, prompting the lawyer in the preparation of the papers. He was of the untemperamental, calm-eyed type of red-haired man. There is such a type, whose "sandy" hair and complexion and dull freckles fairly exude repose, and such a one you will remember—if you think hard enough—for that kind of a red-haired man is rare.

He was lank, tall, and muscular. If he had any nerves he did not know it. He was ruminantly glad to be alive, and he took his bettered fortunes as a matter of course.

Withal, in him was a quality of mild stubbornness, like that of a mule that merely balks but does not kick. This quality he did not keep on constant tap, but saved it merely for occasions when he considered that his inalienable rights, guaranteed from Magna Carta until now, were being tampered with.

When Evan handed Silas his papers, and pocketed his modest fee, he sat immersed in thought. Suddenly he uttered a mild whoop of exultation.

The inspiration he had sought for days was found.

II.

JONAS CORWELL, the leading laundryman of Palmyrus, for whom Silas Weeks had been building a small cottage for summer boarders, received a letter on a day early in June. As he read it his chubby cheeks ruffled like starchy frills and his marble eyes popped indignant dismay:

Palmyrus, June 3.

MY DEAR MR. CORWELL:

Mr. Silas Weeks has seen me regarding a balance of five hundred dollars claimed due from you on the cottage he lately completed for you, and in which he understands summer boarders are already quartered. He asks me what course to take to collect.

I have advised him of his right to file a lien upon the premises, but have counseled against so drastic a step until we have tried for amicable adjustment.

I believe that if you will call at my office upon receipt of this letter, we can arrive at an understanding.

Very truly yours,
EVAN TODD.

Jonas Corwell, who was so constructed that he could have made faster time by rolling, stuffed the letter in his pocket and chuffed, wheezing, to Lawyer Todd's office.

Todd, immaculate in the light spring suit of year before last, was properly affable and sympathetic. He pensively rubbed his twitching rabbit's nose as he intoned the situation to Mr. Corwell, who wriggled in his chair as if it contained tacks.

"You know, Mr. Corwell, Sile Weeks is a mighty good fellow, and so are you. When Sile thinks he's right, he's set in his way, and you're that way, too. And what good is a man without a will? Now, as I see it, it's just a case of each of you thinking he has a just grievance. Sile says that balance was to have been paid upon the completion of the work, three weeks ago. And you consider the work fell short of the stipulations, in some slight respects, I believe—"

"I should say so!" puffed the laundryman indignantly. "Only they wa'n't *slight*! Take them laths up-stairs—you could throw cats through 'em, an' dogs—"

"The laths held the plaster, didn't they?" blandly inquired Todd, leaning back in his chair and looking wise.

"Y-yes," admitted Corwell reluctantly, "but it ain't as smooth a job as it ought to have been. If I wa'n't goin' to paper in the fall, it would make a lot o' difference."

"Now I'll tell you," pursued Evan, leaning forward and transfixing Corwell with his bug eyes, "there's more than one way to skin a cat: all at once or by slow degrees, while she yowls. You fellows could take off your coats and go at each other over at the county-seat, and one of you be beaten, and carry it up, and—"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the laundryman, dismayed, "I don't want to law it. I don't want no trouble with any one. I never had none before. All I want is my rights, an' that job—"

"Sile aims to do all right," alleged the attorney, "and he feels the same as you do. And so do I. I could advise him

to do *anything*, and he'd do it, and make you all sorts of trouble, particularly as you expressed perfect satisfaction with the job, in writing, just before it was finished. Do you remember that note you wrote him?"

"Y-yes, but afterward—"

"Ah-h!" murmured Evan, playfully wagging a forefinger at him, "but be careful what you write, man. Could you convince a judge and a jury, after writing that note, that you had any valid reason for withholding that \$500?"

"I don't know. I never had anything to do with judges an' juries," acknowledged Corwell unhappily.

"You're lucky," responded Evan seriously. "I want to make it my business to keep you out of it."

Corwell's agate eyes flared with hope as Todd proceeded after a slight pause. "A lawyer bears a heavy responsibility toward the community. I could get you and Sile in an uproar that might last for years. But I'm not here to disturb this community, but to heal its differences and bring men together in friendship.

"I consider the mission of a so-called 'office lawyer' the noblest one here on earth. I had rather sit here and mediate between a pair of old friends, who have had honest differences and bring them together, than to wrangle in open court."

He stared solemnly at Jonas, who nodded, impressed.

"I have already won a concession from Sile Weeks, if you want to meet him halfway," suggested Todd. "If you will make him out a check to-day for \$450, he will take that amount in full payment of the balance, thereby allowing you \$50 for your grievance over the lath and the other small details; you to leave the check with me."

Corwell exhaled a great sigh of relief. He had been ready to pay the full \$500. He had never before received a letter from a lawyer; it had scared him.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed hastily. "Got a blank check?"

He stared anxiously, fearful that Todd would change his mind. He left a few moments later, rejoicing in having unexpectedly saved \$50; feeling a sort of shamefaced exultation in having somehow put it over

his old friend, Silas Weeks, and with the crowning, vague impression of having escaped some sinister doom with which the courts had always been associated in his mind.

An hour later, with mien strangely nervous for a man the village generally regarded as a stoic, Silas Weeks entered Evan Todd's office.

"Well," he asked hesitantly, "I ain't seen you for a couple o' days. Did you send Jonas Corwell that letter?"

With a quiet, triumphant air Evan handed him the check, in the body of which Corwell had written, "to balance account."

"I gave him a receipt," said Evan.

Silas drew out a red bandanna and mopped his brow. He exhaled a great sigh.

"Good work, Evan!" he acknowledged. "I was afraid, after your an' my talk, we might have to go to law, an' I wouldn't sleep nights. I ain't never had a lawsuit, an' I don't want none."

"You're right there!" endorsed the slender limb of the abhorred law. "It's much better to settle disputes in an office."

"Uhuh!" said Weeks, appearing again to relish the summer sunshine that streamed through the window. "Did you have much trouble with Jonas, Evan?"

"Jonas isn't the most *reasonable* person in the world," answered Todd, with an air of weary reminiscence. "I had to talk to him a long time. He had laths on the brain. But I finally got him to admit that the plaster held."

"Maybe I hurried that job too much," admitted Weeks, "but he made me. He wanted the place sure an' ready for them danged summer boarders. Anyway, it was a mighty little thing for him to kick about."

"Jonas is a good fellow," soothed Todd. "But remember, he's a laundryman. And a man in that business would be apt to be peevish sometimes, like a woman over the wash-tub."

"Maybe so," nodded the mild, red-haired man. "Well, Evan, what do I owe you?"

"Oh," promptly responded Todd, "my charges are moderate. Let's see; that balance was \$500; ten per cent is about right. Fifty dollars will cover it."

"Wha— I see!" mumbled Silas Weeks

blinking. He had expected to pay five dollars; ten at the most. Now, having thrown off fifty dollars from the balance due, at Evan's suggestion, he was called upon to produce another fifty. He was a hundred dollars out on that job.

Slowly he dug up a portly roll of bills and counted out five tens, which he passed over to Evan and received the check, which he placed in his wallet.

"Well, keepin' out of the courts is cheap at the price," he managed to acknowledge. A thin note of grievance crept into his next words.

"Beats all, when a place starts to grow, there ain't the neighbor spirit there useter be. Folks get restless, an' sort o' snarl at each other, an' pick flaws!"

"You should worry; you're getting yours out of the growth," Even reminded him.

"Yes," slowly answered Weeks; "that is, *most* of it," and he went out, thinking regretfully of a figure one and two ciphers. For almost anywhere, one hundred dollars are—one hundred dollars.

At his desk sat Evan Todd, fifty dollars warm in his pocket, a peculiar grin writhing his thin lips. His mental retina beheld the face, like a silver-bearded sea-lion's, of Hannibal Hoyt, of Bucephalus. From those aged lips, lifting to reveal protuberant teeth like a horse's, seemed to proceed the words of commendation: "Attaboy!"

III.

THE weeks winged on, while the folk of Palmyrus, stirred with the leaven of discontent as never before, continued to carp at the town carpenter, whom circumstances had called to act as a contractor and builder.

Came a day early in September, when the leaves of the soft maples glowed in flamboyant glories and the last of the summer visitors were departing. The season just ended had been kind to Evan Todd, defending his single client against the ill-nature of former village friends. With an income aggregating several hundred dollars Evan had bought new furniture for his office and secured some new apparel.

He looked very modish, and somehow more "rabbity" than ever as a slow step

entered his office. He looked up brightly into a face that reflected no joy of the autumnal morning's glow.

When a red-haired man is suffering from mental gloom, the melancholia of a biped with any other color of hair, resembles, by contrast, a state of maudlin joy.

"Good morning, Sile," breezed the attenuated member of the law. "Well, I've got that matter brought up by old Job Snodgrass arranged."

Involuntarily Weeks cast about him a furtive glance, as if he expected somebody to pounce upon him. "That so?" he replied, rather listlessly. "What's *he* want?"

"Well," pursued Evan, a little hesitantly, "I had *some* time with *him*!"

This, by the way, was true. Job Snodgrass, an old farmer transplanted to relatively urban scenes, had been troubled all his life by a vague sense of something lacking in it. Only in recent weeks had he discovered what it was: a repressed desire to "row it" with somebody. Introduced to its insidious attraction, he had now desired to pursue it with fierce joy.

"He says you guaranteed those hardwood floors wouldn't squeak," Evan went on, "and—"

"I don't remember it comin' up at all," interrupted Weeks drearily, "but maybe it did, an' *maybe* I guaranteed 'em. I ain't had much experience in layin' hardwood floors; he's the first man that ever wanted 'em laid here to amount to anything. He's aimin' to grab the 'class' trade next summer."

"Just so," assented Todd, "and he says the way they are, he won't get it. He refers to them as 'musical floors,'" he added with a giggle. "He says there are enough sounds to them so—if you could learn to step on them just right—you could play tunes to the range of a piano. He claims they yowl like a cat-fight. He—"

"Snodgrass was always more or less of a liar," interrupted Weeks, without enthusiasm. "What's his proposition, that's what I want to know."

"Well," returned Todd, unable to restrain a slight trace of anxiety, for fear Weeks would balk and fail to produce the ready money, "I had a hard time getting

him to listen to anything like reason. He's not like the rest of them; I think he'd almost prefer a fight in open court. But I'm not a court lawyer; I'm an office lawyer.

"I told him your ultimatum; that you must have that fifteen hundred at once, and you'd do what you could, with thin nails, to take the squeak out of those floors."

He picked up a bit of tinted paper from his desk.

"The best he'd do," he concluded reluctantly, "was to make out this check for thirteen hundred dollars, in my charge, and to leave word you could take it, and let the floors go as they are, or sue him, as you liked."

A moment's silence ensued. Weeks stood frowning thoughtfully while Todd sat nervously fingering the check.

"Beats all what's got into this town," finally muttered Weeks. "Till this summer every one got along with every one else. Now they're crowdin' the waitin' list to take a shot at me."

"Did you ever think they might be jealous?" tentatively suggested Todd. "You're doing the biggest business in town, you know."

"Jealous of *me*?" jeered the heckled contractor. "Well, they needn't be. I've just handled the money, that's all. With these adjustments, my profit an' loss column is plumb under water. All I've had this summer is the exercise." He pondered a little longer, while Todd waited hopefully.

"I won't resk a lawsuit," grimly decided the contractor at last. "I *might* have guaranteed them floors not to yodle—not thinkin', an' not knowin' much about 'em anyway—and, anyway, his wife was there. She'd swear to anything for a penny. Give me the \$1,300 check—an' how much do I owe you?"

Evan strove to exclude undue exaltation from his tone.

"Oh," he replied magnanimously, "I stick to the ten per cent, and not on the fifteen hundred figure, but the thirteen hundred. One hundred and thirty dollars will square us."

For an instant Weeks looked at him hard. He contrived to return the regard with an assumption of imperturbability.

"I ain't got that much by me in cash," Silas finally told him dryly. "Push me over a blank check on the bank."

Todd complied with alacrity, and his proffer of pen and ink was anticipated by the flashing of Silas's fountain pen.

Paying no heed to his somewhat rambling comments, Weeks stolidly walked out. Evan was vaguely disturbed by his manner. Had he overreached himself this time? This single and well-paying client of his should be nursed along. That was how cunning old Hannibal Hoyt, of Bucephalus, nursed *his* clients.

Evan would have been more seriously disturbed if he had known that the rear door of his office, opening into the living-room, was ajar during his colloquy with Weeks, and that behind it was the glowering face of his roomer and boarder in so far as they divided the expense of the table, Walter Sims.

Sims was leaving in two days for some city in the West that he had not named. Palmyrus contained no better-known young man, nor more of a "gadder," as the old ladies called him. Walter was socially inclined, and he knew everybody and everybody's business.

Still more deeply would Evan Todd have been disturbed that evening if—when strolling in the moonlight—he had known that Sims was pawing through his desk, which he had carelessly left unlocked, and finding certain memoranda that told him a story of double-dealing.

He lifted at last a wizen face contorted with fury and cold malice. In a whisper of fierceness he cursed the absent Todd.

"Why, you ferret-faced, gooseberry-eyed, double-crossing son of a thief! You will, will you? I won't bone you for the deficit, you poor ape; *I'll leave you something when I'm gone to remember me by!*"

IV.

A MASTER of dissimulation, Walter Sims did not reveal to Evan Todd, when he left him to go to the train, that his tolerance of the other had turned to hate. He parted with the lawyer, assuming cordiality. He took a green, twisted something that Evan pressed into his hand without question, or

without glancing at it. He knew he was being "done," as he had been throughout the summer—but—*wait!*

On the way to the train Sims dropped a letter in the post-office. Then he sped westward, gloating.

That night Evan Todd was taken suddenly ill with a severe attack of the grip, and had to call the doctor who had attended his aunt. The case proved serious, and he narrowly escaped pneumonia. He was confined to his bed for several weeks and a trained nurse was sent for from Rochester. Todd groaned in spirit while he was convalescing. Sickness was certainly more expensive than health. Here was his little roll of savings, garnered from the troubles of Contractor Silas Weeks the past summer, going—going—all but gone. The two hundred dollars left by his aunt he had foolishly—through false confidence—expended in improvements to the cottage.

Twice, before the nurse left, Evan's heart thrilled with hope. For twice there had called to see him Silas Weeks, to leave when the nurse said her patient was still weak.

It must be that Weeks had started the winter building the villagers had been talking of having done, so as to be ready for the next summer season. Palmyrus was certainly indenting herself upon the map. In that case Weeks must be in trouble again, and, constitutionally averse to lawsuits, was seeking Evan's legal counsel and talent for adjusting disputes—at Silas's expense. Perhaps, after all, he would have an easy winter.

At last, one day the nurse left for Rochester. Evan, looking spick and span in his best suit, breakfasted and went into his office and sat down before his desk. Somehow, after the long days of easy convalescence, he felt quite strong again. This was as well—for presently he would need that strength.

The door opened. Into the office stepped a visitor he had not expected. Yet she would probably do as well, for she was Mrs. Silas Weeks—the Nettie Dalzell who had scorned him long before.

With alacrity Evan rose and bowed her toward a chair, while he chatted, noting that she was prettier than she used to be

when they had been "kids" together. But she coldly shook her sleek, dark head and remained standing.

"I understand Mr. Weeks called twice while I was sick," sired Evan, flashing toward her the languishing smile of the recently convalesced. He had not yet noted the lady's frigidity, and assumed she had come with a commission of business from her husband.

"Yes," replied Nettie Weeks, with the slow, precise utterance of her days as school-mistress. "He called twice, hoping you were well enough to thrash!"

"What?" gasped Evan Todd, and sat down heavily in his chair. "Wh-wh-why?" But his bewilderment was hypocritical; in his guilty soul he knew.

"A cheap shyster runs a risk when employing cheap help, unless he deals fairly with that help. But a shyster deals fairly with nobody. So, in the end, an honest man, even if he does not receive his dues, stands a chance, at least, of being delivered from the jaws of sharks!"

"Cheap help!" stammered Todd, wriggling like a fish. "I don't understand!"

"Oh, yes, you do!" snapped the lady. "I mean that other sneak, Walter Sims, of course! He told me all about it in a letter when he left; he didn't dare even to *write* to my husband. He told me how you got him to stir up trouble at all the houses where Silas was working. How, in his sly way, he would get every one complaining, and they would hold back our money, so as to give you a chance to 'adjust' things at Silas's expense.

"He told how you intended to collect ten per cent from Silas. Then you were to give *him* ten per cent of the money *you* collected. But he wrote he found you were only giving him from three to five per cent, through lying to him about the amounts you collected, so he wrote me that letter to get even."

Evan was now white and quivering.

"Say," he gasped at random, "give me time; don't tell anybody—"

"The whole town knows it!" she flung at him.

"What?" he almost shrieked.

"Yes," she told him savagely, "I told

everybody, of course. That letter of Sims has been published, or will be; it comes out to-day in the weekly. You can sue for slander, or libel, or whatever you call it, if you want to. The people of this place are naturally neighborly; they wanted to return to Silas the amounts they'd demanded as rebates, but we wouldn't let them. And they'd like to *lynch* you! There's a movement to disbar you, and they've got good old Erasmus Hawkins, an *honest* lawyer, to head it. Also, they're agitating having you arrested; I forget the technical charge, but it means *scoundrel*!"

She turned toward the door. She was very lovely in her gray costume and toque to match; with her red, red cheeks and her black eyes sparkling with anger.

"I'm glad your aunt was called to rest before you revealed yourself, you *leaner*!" she flashed. "Perhaps the poor little cottage in which she toiled so hard to put you through college will yield enough of a mortgage later to furnish you future bail!"

"I called to warn you not to be in town a week from now. Silas will be home for the week-end, and I wouldn't answer for the consequences. He's ordinarily easy, but his hair is red. He never let himself go but once, and then he nearly killed a man. *You're* not worth a man going to the chair!"

"Where is he?" mumbled Evan Todd, hazily remembering the depths of gloom that had enshrouded Silas during those later days when he was victimizing him. "He isn't in a—*sanatorium*—is he?"

"Silas? Why, he's at Urbanus, at the university, where I told him, before he branched out, he ought to go. He's taking a course in the laws pertaining to architecture and modern building, so that he can get along without a lawyer!"

The door slammed behind her, leaving Evan Todd white and staring.

V.

THE shades of night were falling when Evan Todd, carrying two grips, slunk out upon a little-frequented road leading westward from Palmyrus. Over his diminished head winged dark-brown clouds, corresponding in hue to his present taste of life. He shivered within his overcoat in a pierc-

ing October wind. The frost was on the pumpkin and the fodder was in shock.

Evan had not dared to risk the trolley. Locking the door of the cottage that had been his respected aunt's, he was walking to the station of the next town, to catch a late train south.

Underneath that thatch of tow wild thoughts were whirring in gyrations like a toy top. The white-bearded, otter face of Hannibal Hoyt, of Bucephalus, seemed surveying him with a malicious grip. Now, too late, in the whirl of his slender intellectuals, he perceived some salient differences between that ghoulish master and his fallen pupil.

Old Hannibal had not one victim, but many. Adeptly he played "both ends against the middle," and he played the game alone. Assuredly it required some finesse successfully to sin, said success lying in getting away with it.

Old Man Fate, coarsely sneering, was fairly shouting at Evan Todd a message which he was not mentally able to assimilate as yet, and it was this:

"Stand until you can afford to lean—and then *don't*!"

Evan Todd, breathing hard after the inopportune luxury of his illness, staggering under the weight of his two grips, sneaked into the railroad station at Tallington. He set down the satchel. He approached the ticket-window, feeling forlornly in a trouser pocket. He had a ten-dollar bill, three ones and fifty cents in change.

He shoved the ten-dollar bill under the wicket. "Give me a ticket," he panted hoarsely.

The supercilious eyebrows of the agent were upraised. "Where to?" he questioned, an incipient titter in his tone.

"Why—why," stammered Evan Todd. Then the storm in his brain began afresh, the raw winds of his terrors whipping away all coherence.

Cravenly he invoked whatever mercies the astonished agent might possess, while deepened in growling thunders the roar of the approaching train.

"Say!" cried wildly the lawyer who was leaving, willy-nilly, "how far can I get for ten dollars?"

The Single Track

by Douglas Grant

Author of "Booty," "The Fifth Ace," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

WITH the failure of the Gildersleeve Copper Company, Janetta Gildersleeve found herself at twenty-one coowner with her brother Ollie (the latter absent in France) of the new Northern Star Mining Company, near Katalak, Alaska. But without a railroad the mine was worthless, and both the Northern Star and its unscrupulous competitor, the Unatika, were rivals in the building of a single-track road, the completion of which would establish the right of possession and monopoly.

The Gildersleeve Copper Company had failed through the treachery of Gordon Winfield, an old enemy of the departed Gildersleeve, Sr., and the new venture had been started under cover, so to speak, the real owners known only to Geddes, family lawyer; MacLeod, Eastern office manager; Janetta, and Hoyt, the new engineer.

Meeting a prepossessing stranger by way of an auto accident, Janey, after dismissing her paid companion, Mrs. Everton, resolved to go to Katalak to discover, if possible, evidence of machinations against the company, and while packing found proof that Mrs. Everton had discovered the true ownership of the Northern Star. And it appeared that the latter was going West in Grace Winfield's private car! Telling her friend, Persis Cheever, that she was going on a journey, and exacting secrecy even of this scant information, Janey reached Katalak, where she had arranged to become assistant storekeeper, passing as the daughter of Peddar, the Gildersleeve butler. There, at the boarding house of "Ma" Heaney, after a somewhat uneasy night, she was treated to a surprise in finding Hoyt and the "workingman" of the accident to be one and the same. But he on his part gave no sign.

At the restaurant a man with curiously light eyes made himself obnoxious to Janey and Peddar, whom she learned later from Jud Pittinger, proprietor of the company store, was Hugh Malison, general superintendent of the Unatika. Then, when she had been duly installed as assistant, her first customer appeared in the person of Malison. He leered at her boldly, asking crudely for a kiss. Janey reached for the gun under the counter. "Come now, will you give it to me or shall I take it?" Malison asked hoarsely.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ENEMY—AND A FRIEND.

JANE regarded him critically, although she could feel her whole body trembling with the indignation and fear which consumed her.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she said coolly. "You see I have a—a 'gat,' I think they call it, right here in my hand, and as I'm not very well acquainted with firearms, it might go off. I should hate to

think of another accident happening to any of the Northern Star outfit."

For a moment she thought that the man would seize her, but she held him steadily with her eyes, and something in them must have warned him that she was in earnest. The quick menace which had leaped into his face burned itself out slowly, and he drew back with a sneering laugh.

"Wild West stuff, eh?" he drawled. "Don't get yourself all excited, little lady—I can wait. But I'll have that kiss yet!"

This story began in *The Argosy* for August 30.

As he yanked up his coat-collar and jerked down the brim of the rubber hat it seemed to Jane's horror that the silent laughter which shook him must be echoing through the store. He turned without another word and slouched out of the door, almost colliding with the bandaged arm of a tall, lanky individual who edged in with unaccustomed shyness, his leathery face dyed a rich mahogany. He glanced absently after the man who had just left, and then his eyes returned to the girl as if fascinated.

Jane was still flushed with ire at the late encounter, but at sight of the newcomer's obvious embarrassment she managed an encouraging smile.

"Good morning," she said. "D-did you want to buy something? I'm the new assistant storekeeper."

The new arrival gulped.

"No'm—yes'm." He corrected himself and swore softly beneath his breath. That smile had been his undoing. "Pretty day, ain't it?"

"Pretty wet one!" Jane laughed. "What do you call bad weather up here in Katalak?"

"October till April." Harve found his voice with the familiar topic. "Nothin' but snow and da-dampness, all the time. You'll see some sunshine if you stay long enough, ma'am."

He had pulled off his hat and stood turning it while the rain dripped from it between his fingers and the conversation lagged.

"I—I expect to stay until the road goes through," Jane observed at last. "Are you one of the—"

She paused, and her prospective customer announced hastily:

"I'm Harve Dugdale, superintendent of dock construction, ma'am." Then his eyes lighted upon the opened box of cigars and slowly bulged.

Jane's glance followed his.

"This is some of the new stock Mr. Pittinger just got in; it came on the same steamer with my father and me." She pushed the box toward him. "Try one, Mr. Dugdale—five cents."

Being wholly unable to express his

amazement in language fit for this new storekeeper's ears, Harve mutely took one of the cigars, smelled it half incredulously, then shaking his head, replaced it.

"No, ma'am. I—I don't like to contradict a lady, but I'd be cheatin' you."

"Oh, I know that's a little below what they sell for at home, but I'm sure of my orders." Jane dimpled. "Maybe the Northern Star people want to—to take off some of the price for the men who are putting through the road for them."

Harve stared.

"I reckon you don't know much about mining companies, ma'am," he remarked. "Has Jud got any more new stock in?"

Not untruthfully had Persis Cheever said, on that day which seemed a thousand years ago, that Janey could sell anything to anybody. When Harve Dugdale turned at last reluctantly to the door his pockets were emptied of everything save his pen-knife, his gat, and a lonely fragment of plug, but his arms were piled high with strange and gaudy garments, boxes of candy, and dried fruit, highly scented soap, and an astonishing new razor in a leather case.

One resolve had emerged from the chaos of his mind: if Jud had slyly laid in all this ——— regalia in anticipation of the lady's appearance on the scene, then he, Harve, meant to be the first and best-dressed man in Katalak.

At the door, while he was struggling to replace his hat with his lame arm, Jane overtook him and momentarily relieved him of his burdens.

"How did you get hurt?" she asked shyly.

"Just a little accident, ma'am." Harve reddened.

"One of the kind I've been hearing about—on the steamer coming up here, I mean?" Jane added hurriedly. "People were talking about some funny accidents that have been happening ever since the road was started."

"Yes'm." Harve paused, and then said with a touch of sudden roughness in his tone: "Excuse me, but there ain't anybody up here like you, and your father is kind of an old man. If—if anybody says

anything to you or—or just *looks*, you let me know. I'm pretty generally on the job."

"Thank you!" There was a little catch in Jane's voice, and as he departed she watched his lanky figure disappear in the rain with a new warmth about her heart. She had made a possible enemy of the man with the queer, light eyes, but she felt that at least she had made one friend in this hulking, kindly fellow, and the first tentative move in the task she had set for herself was accomplished.

CHAPTER X.

JANE ROLLS UP HER SLEEVES.

"**T**HERE ain't a might of use talkin' to me, deary," Ma Heaney observed as she seated herself heavily on Jane's groaning bed. "I knew from the minute I laid eyes on you that you wasn't fit for this kind of life, and woman to woman, I think your pa was an old fool to bring you up here."

"But, Mrs. Heaney, I like the store, and Mr. Pittinger is so nice!" Jane protested, looking up from the bag which she was unpacking before the other's frankly curious gaze.

Ma Heaney shook her head.

"They ain't all like Jud," she responded. "The Unatika outfit's the worst, but the Northern Star ain't exactly a celestial choir, and as for the miners and hands from the cannery—I come from a big city myself—Chicago—and I've traveled some since, but this town 'll have 'em all backed off the map for trouble when the real ruction starts."

"What—er—ruccion?" asked Jane.

"When them two outfits comes to grips," the other explained. "I was thinkin' some of sellin' out myself and mushin' down to Seattle, but I ain't never been run out of any town yet, and I don't propose to vamoose now just because there's liable to be a battle. It's no place for a little soft thing like you, though. Now, if you was to go down to Tacoma, and get in a nice, pretty millinery store, or open an ice-cream parlor—"

Jane laughed.

"I'm not going to run away, either!" she declared. "But do you really think it will come to an open fight, Mrs. Heaney?"

"It's fixin'," predicted her landlady. "There's been no gun-play yet, but when the work starts on the road next week the Unatika people 'll likely come out in the open. My!" she broke off to exclaim. "Those are sure pretty things! But what in time you brought 'em up here to *work* in for—"

Jane looked in some dismay at the plain but fine lingerie which billowed out of the bag.

"It's all very simple," she protested.

"So are them toilet things, but not for Katalak," retorted Ma Heaney. "Them dresses, too, that I took out of your trunk this morning to keep from gettin' rumped—if I was you, and you're lookin' to make some real money, I'd sell 'em to the girls. You'll get three times what you paid for 'em—"

"What girls?" interrupted Jane.

Ma Heaney's voluminous bulk twisted somewhat uncomfortably, and her face reddened.

"Well, them that do what you'd call kind of a vaudeville act at the dance halls. I could sell 'em for you. There's Etta and May and Pearl—"

"Is one of them young and thin and tired-looking, with rather pretty eyes?" queried Jane suddenly. "I saw her at the restaurant last night."

Ma Heaney nodded.

"That's Etta Carney. She's stuck on Hugh Malison, and he used to meet her in there reg'lar, but he's kinder given her the cold shoulder now. He's got the same job with the Unatika outfit that big Jim Bowers has with the Northern Star, and I suspicion that he knows somethin', one way or another, about them 'accidents' that have been happenin'. But here I sit gossipin' when I got a hull floor to clean!" She rose and waddled reluctantly to the door. "You let me know, deary, if you decide to sell any of your things, and I'll fix it for you."

Left alone, Jane sat still on the floor in

the midst of her belongings, thinking over what she had learned. So that frail, weary-eyed girl was in love with Malison—Malison, that beast who had insulted her in the store that morning! Jane shuddered anew at the memory of the encounter.

And he was the general superintendent of the Unatika, the man who, in Ma Heaney's estimation at least, knew something of the accidents which had delayed the building of the road! Jane shrewdly suspected from the very way in which the buxom landlady had checked herself in the flood tide of her garrulity that she knew far more herself than she was willing to gossip about the machinations of the rival company, yet why she, a townswoman, and unconnected with either outfit, should take sides with the Northern Star remained to be discovered.

Of her sincerity the girl had no doubt; honesty shone from her broad, good-natured countenance. But how far she might be depended upon in a crisis, or to keep a confidence—Jane shook her head. She must trust no one.

Ma Heaney's sharp eyes had already discerned in spite of her dissimulation that she was not quite the type of girl she pretended to be, and her curiosity if not her suspicion was aroused. Jane was none too confident that Peddar would not unconsciously betray them both if he were artfully cross-examined, and she determined to keep him as much under her eye as possible until they had established themselves in a domicile of their own.

She heard his voice in the office as she descended the stairs, and the tones in which the response came made her pause. Surely that must be the engineer, Barney Hoyt. Had he recognized her? Was he trying to pump poor old Peddar? She stole softly down.

"No, sir." Peddar's tone had slipped dangerously back into the subservient inflection of lifelong habit. "We are not from New York, sir. I believe a Mr. MacLeod engaged my daughter to come up here. She can tell you about that. Did you say up three streets and to the right past the—er—Happy Days Café, sir?"

"Yes, but don't let any of the boys hear

you mention a 'café' in Katalak, or you'll be mobbed."

That laughing voice was unmistakably Barney Hoyt's, and Jane realized with exasperation that he must have taken Peddar's measure; he did not "Mr." him. Must she be servile, too, in order that he should not discover the difference in station between herself and her pseudo father?

She tossed her head rebelliously at the very thought. This "workingman" should be put in his place! But she—she was a "working girl" herself now! Why couldn't she remember?

"Very good, sir." Jane could have slapped Peddar at that moment! "I shall try to remember, but it is all very different up here from what I expected, sir. I'll go and have a look at the cottage you speak of."

As Peddar crossed the hall and vanished down the rickety steps, Jane descended and entered the office with her chin in the air.

"Good afternoon." Barney Hoyt smiled with frank pleasure. "Think you will like your job at the store, Miss Peddar?"

Was there an ironic emphasis on the last two words? Jane flushed hotly.

"I guess so," she responded cautiously, checking the imperious rejoinder that rose to her lips. She must not give herself away to him, of all men. "There isn't much difference in selling goods over one counter or another."

"You have worked in a store before, then?" He eyed her keenly.

"If you want my references, Mr. Hoyt, you can get them from Mr. MacLeod in New York!" The retort was irrepressible. "I should have brought them had I thought they would be required here."

Hoyt's face grew grave, but there seemed to be an underlying twinkle in his brown eyes.

"I did not mean to be curious," he assured her coolly. "I know that it isn't quite the thing up here in Alaska to ask personal questions, but since I am in charge of the outfit, I did not think it amiss. And the outfit includes the company store, Miss Peddar."

"Over Mr. Pittinger?" she demanded, He nodded.

"And Jim Bowers," he supplemented. "You are just as much a part of the outfit now as one of the track-layers or bull gang. But I came to ask you if you would not like to let me show you where we start the road work next week. We're bringing it around just back of the bunk-houses parallel with Main Street, and it's only a step or two."

A curt refusal was upon her tongue, but again Jane controlled herself. She must not let this chance to learn a little about the work slip by.

"I'll be glad to go if you will wait while I get my hat and cloak," she said quietly. "I must be back at the store for the three o'clock shift."

She inwardly raged at herself as she sped up-stairs. How stupid of her to have allowed this odious young man to put her again in the wrong! If she had only known the identity of the chief engineer, and that he would have discretionary powers over even the store, she would not have come one step of the way to Katalak, not even if the hateful Unatika Company gobbled up the Northern Star!

That he, of all people, should be in authority over her! The idea was maddening, but with a quick revulsion of feeling she giggled; why, if he only knew it, the tables were turned! It was she who was in absolute command now that Ollie was in France; she, the half owner of the Northern Star mine! She could even order his dismissal if he became too impossible!

Then a steady thought brought a quick flush of self-rebuke to her cheeks. If Peddar was drifting back into the personality of other days, was she not also in danger of letting the old Janetta dominate over the character she had assumed, and which she must retain until the end if she were to play the game? Could petty personal spite toward a man who meant nothing to her, a mere employee, be allowed to mitigate against the success of the work which meant not only her own future, but Ollie's? What a selfish, arrogant little beast she was!

Of course this man Hoyt was right from his point of view; in justice she had to admit that to herself, and she ought to be

glad that he was so conscientious. As chief of the works he had to assure himself that every employee was not only competent, but thoroughly reliable, especially in view of the underhand work with which he had to contend. She herself might have been a spy and confederate of the Unatika outfit, for all he knew!

In a considerably more chastened frame of mind Jane descended once more, and it was with a decidedly meek tone that she observed:

"I understood from Mr. MacLeod that the work had already started on the railroad. Of course, I don't know anything about it."

"The preliminary survey had been made and the road staked out before I came," Barney Hoyt responded. "I don't think you'll need that rubber coat, for the rain has stopped."

Jane laid the garment obediently over a chair in the office and thrust her hands in her sweater pockets as she followed her guide to the door. The rain had indeed ceased, and a thin, pale sunlight was streaking down from a rift in the clouds.

"You see, we've assembled all our equipment, chopped down spruce for our ties, and cut them up in the sawmill." The engineer continued as they set forth. "Now we've got to start grading the first five miles of road-bed—but this must be all Greek to you!"

"What happened to Mr. Dugdale's arm?" Jane asked irrelevantly. "He would only tell me that it was an accident; but I have already heard about the accidents that have been happening up here all the time since the work started, and about that other company who want to put a road through, too. Do you anticipate any trouble, Mr. Hoyt?"

He darted a swift, sidelong glance at her, but her face expressed only naive inquiry, and he shrugged.

"I expect almost anything on a job of this kind, but we'll be ready to protect our own interests if the other side start trouble, and we are going to push the road through, all right."

There was no hint of bragging in his tone, but a quiet firmness which sent a lit-

tle thrill through Jane in spite of her late resentment.

"Don't let any one frighten you, Miss Peddar. I don't think they'll attempt any open rough stuff, and if they should you will not be in it."

"If I had been afraid I wouldn't have come up here," Miss Peddar asserted stoutly. "They have only done just sneaking, underhand things so far, haven't they?"

"We don't actually know who is at the bottom of the mischief yet." He spoke with a note of reserve. "We'll turn down this lane here. You'll find it rather muddy, I expect, but you will get used to that if you stay."

"I'll stay if I can do the work at the store all right," Jane retorted. "I'm not a fine society lady, you know, to be afraid of mud and roughing it, and—and soiling my hands. I'm a working girl."

She added the last slyly, and averted her face that he might not read the lurking mischief in her eyes. If he recognized her he must speak now. At least, he did not know the name of the girl he had encountered on that far-off night.

"Of course, but Katalak mud is different from that in the East, and you are not accustomed to the life up here," he remarked. "You'll find a lot of things very different, but you'll be fairly comfortable when you and your father get settled."

It was Jane's turn for a surreptitious glance, but his expression was inscrutable.

"Oh, father and I aren't a bit alike," she said carelessly. "He thinks he is adventurous, but he isn't, at all: he has been dreaming of getting to Alaska for years, and now that he is here, I think it all rather frightens him. Is this where the road is to be?"

They had passed the last of the huddled shacks on the side road which had ended in a vast stretch of mud, in which here and there patches of moss and coarse, stunted grass formed dank oases of green. Almost at their feet were the stakes left by the surveyors, and these marched off, two and two, in a narrowing vista straight into the foothills to the north. Beyond them the faint, lofty line of the St. Elias range lifted snowy peaks against the sky.

Jane drew a deep breath. Somewhere there back of those foothills lay the Northern Star mine, the fortune which was to await Ollie on his return if only the man beside her were able to finish his task. Where those stakes led would lie an unbroken double line of gleaming rails, and down them would come the ore cars bringing the copper to the wharf, the first stage of the trip to the smelters at Tacoma.

Could the miracle be wrought? It seemed a mere trackless waste of desolation about her now. In a few short months, at most, could that magic path of steel be built which would lead to the mine?

Jane lifted a glowing face to the young engineer's to find him gazing quizzically at her, and she lowered her eyes hastily in unwonted confusion.

"It—it seems like a tremendous job, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Not here. Of course, it's only a little single-track jitney road, anyway, but back up there we'll have to trestle over a narrow glacier bed, and if the other gang succeed in hampering us until they get their own equipment assembled, there will be a real race for it." He turned. "We'd better be starting back now; there isn't much to look at yet, but I thought you would like to see where the actual work will commence."

"I'm glad I did," Jane replied. "I'm glad to feel that I am a part of it all as you said, Mr. Hoyt. Part of the work, I mean. It must bring a real sense of achievement to complete a job of that sort, even if you only help it along by selling things to the men who are doing it."

"I wish you would tell me where you sold things before," Hoyt said suddenly. "The reason for asking which I gave you back at Ma Heaney's wasn't all the truth, Miss Peddar. You remind me of some one I saw in the East not so very long ago, and yet you are unlike her, after all."

"Who was she?" Jane asked audaciously.

Hoyt laughed and shook his head.

"The last sort of girl you would find roughing it up here! But you don't belong either, you know. Storekeeping for a mining company is the last thing in the

world which I should think would have appealed to you—"

"That's just because father was able to give me a little better schooling than he had himself, I guess." Jane laughed, too, but it sounded hollow in her own ears. What a dismal failure her attempt at dissimulation must be, when every one, from Ma Heaney to the head of the outfit, could see through her like this! Still, he had not actually recognized her; there was a grain of comfort in that.

They had turned the corner of Main Street once more, and were nearing the barracklike bunk-houses and mess, when above the increasing hammer and clanking of the pile-driver and crane there came a hideous, deafening roar, and somewhere back of and beyond the company store a flash of lurid red rose for an instant against the sky and died like the blast of some huge furnace.

Then came hoarse shouting and the heavy thud of many rushing feet, but Jane was scarcely conscious of it. At the first echo of the explosion Hoyt had dashed forward, and now she was following, running as she had never run in all her life before. The bull gang from the storage yard over the way and the dock hands were converging in a crowd before what seemed to her to be the main office just beyond the company store, but as she neared it she saw that their interest was centered on the group of miscellaneous shacks clustered behind it, from the midst of which a thin curl of smoke was rising.

She wondered vaguely as she sped past them why the men waited out there on the sidewalk, but she did not hear the warning shouts which rang out as she darted around the office shack and dashed through the clinging mud which clutched at her ankles; the chief had gone that way. Why did they not follow?

She rounded another shack and halted suddenly. One of the smaller ones, a mere shed, had collapsed utterly, its rain-soaked boards blackened and smoking. Beside it a solitary figure in overalls and rough flannel shirt lay stretched upon the ground, and Hoyt was bending over it.

Changed as were the surroundings, the

scene brought back in a darting flash of memory that other time when Hoyt had ministered to the tramp her heedlessness had injured, but she did not give herself time to think of that.

Rolling up the sleeves of her sweater, she sprang to his side, and kneeling in the mud, she lifted in her arms the bloody head of the unconscious man.

"Good God! What are you doing here?" cried Hoyt. "Go back! There may be another explosion—"

But Jane was not even listening. With her inadequate scrap of a handkerchief she was wiping away the warm blood from the boy's face—for he was only a boy, and there was a look of Ollie about his sandy hair and firm, square chin.

He was one of her own, one of her companions here in the work they were all doing together, and their common enemy had done this to him! She did not for an instant question that there might not have been foul play, and a wave of mingled compassion and rage shook her from head to foot. She clenched her teeth, sobbing.

"Those Unatika wretches! G-give me your handkerchief, Mr. Hoyt! The poor boy! O-oh, I'd like to—"

She was lifted bodily to her feet and spun about in the mud on them.

"Get out of this!" Hoyt ordered sternly. "Quick! I'll bring him!"

He picked the limp figure up in his arms and swung it over his shoulder, and Jane meekly followed.

She did not know why the men cheered when they reached the sidewalk once more, nor why that strained, listening look died so slowly from the conglomerate mass of faces which clustered about them. The strange, savage rage had left her, and she shivered and drew down her sleeves over her arms without noting the stains which covered them.

"Jumping Jupiter!" A pudgy hand seized her and dragged her aside. "What in Gosh Almighty's world do you mean by taking a chance of gettin' yourself blown to kingdom come for a squarehead?" It was Jud Pittinger's voice, raised in a wail of admiring protest. "Don't you know there's dynamite stored all around there?"

"Will that poor boy live?" Jane demanded anxiously.

"You come along back and wash up and 'tend store!" Jud urged. "I never see the beat of it in my life! Walked right into livin' death, you did!"

"Well, the chief did, too, didn't he?" Without premeditation the words leaped from Jane's lips, and she did not note the change which her simple query brought to the faces about her, as man after man glanced shamedly at his neighbor and turned away. "What have they done with the boy who was hurt?"

"The doc will fix him up." Jud's good-natured face was still stern, but a look of confused deference was creeping over it. "I shouldn't have spoke so—so fresh to you just now, but you scairt me! Come in the store and I'll get you a bucket of water before your father sees you, miss. You got yourself mussed up some."

Jane followed him down the lane which the dividing crowd made for her, still dazed from the shock of the affair, and once in the store she leaned against the counter in the sudden limpness of reaction. It did not occur to her numbed brain what swift impulse had actuated her until a low voice at her side penetrated her consciousness.

"Miss Peddar, I want to take back what I said to you a little while ago, about your reminding me of some one back East whom I had seen." It was Barney Hoyt, and he stood before her with a new look in his eyes. "She could never have done what you did just now."

Jane smiled faintly, and for the first time glanced down at her reddened hands.

"You were right, though, when you said that everything was different up here," she said. "How do you know what she would have done in my place?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN IN THE SHADOW.

THE roar of the explosion reached Peddar at the farther end of the town, but to his unaccustomed ears, deafened by days and nights of continuous noise and

clamor of machinery, it seemed but a part of the general hubbub.

He was standing in a tiny front yard off the side street where already a few straggling plants were budding, lost in a disparaging contemplation of the little shack to which Hoyt had directed him, when a man running heavily past yelled at him:

"Hey, old-timer! Northern Star's got it again! Company store's blown up!"

For one awful moment Peddar's senses reeled, and the little shack blurred and wavered before his eyes. The next instant he had turned and was scuttling as fast as his trembling old legs would carry him back to the main street. He saw the crowd at the water-front, and the store building seemed still to be standing, but where was his beloved mistress?

As he swerved past the lodging-house door, Ma Heaney bounced down the steps and seized him in an ample grasp.

"She's all right, Mr. Peddar! She's in here!"

Peddar almost sobbed in his relief as his informant half dragged him up the steps and into the office, where Jane, very pale, but quite composed, was talking to the general superintendent.

"Oh, miss—Jane, I mean—you're safe? You're not hurt?" he gasped.

"Of course not, father! I wasn't even near when the accident occurred," Jane explained hurriedly to cover that almost inevitable slip. "No one was hurt except one poor boy, and Mr. Bowers says that it isn't serious and he will soon be well. It was just one of the little shacks back of the store that went up in smoke. Was it an accident, Mr. Bowers? I mean was that young workman careless?"

Jim Bowers's face darkened and his great hands clenched.

"It might have been his fault if he had been anywhere else but there!" he muttered. Then his anger flamed out unguardedly: "That dynamite stick was attached to a wire that trailed off east over the lots. I traced it myself just now for about fifty feet, and it led to a battery somewhere like a fire-blast. I lost the wire where it ran into the ground, but it is bound to have been cut, anyway, by now, and the

battery may be half a mile away. The murdering scoundrels!"

Jane's face went a shade paler to hear her own belief confirmed.

"You mean it was the Unatika people at work again?" she asked.

He nodded.

"But they're not the only ones," he affirmed. "If they'd touched it off a day sooner the whole works would have gone up. There was enough dynamite in that shack a few hours ago to have blown all Katalak into the bay! Hoyt and I got a hunch that it wasn't safe, and moved it just in time, but somebody knew it had been there and told. We've got a traitor in camp!"

Peddar shook in his shoes.

"If you've left it anywhere near the store still, Mr. Bowers, miss—my daughter sha'n't go back there again, not if the—"

"Father!" Jane interrupted warningly. "You don't suppose Mr. Bowers is taking any chances on the whole plant, do you?"

"I'm not, if I can help it," the superintendent declared. "But I'm going to get them with the goods yet, and when I do, there won't be much work left for the marshal from Juneau except to take me up for manslaughter! They're showing their hand pretty plainly, and if I can once catch them in the act, it will be all up with them! But don't you worry, Miss Jane. We'll take care of you all right, if you just keep clear of any racket you hear started."

Peddar wrung his hands as the harassed superintendent took his departure.

"If you'd only give it up and come home!" he wailed.

"Home?" Jane's eyes flashed. "Home now, when I see for myself what those wretches are trying to do, and the lengths to which they will go to take everything from us? I'm ashamed of you! To think of Ollie away off there unable to do anything to protect the work, and then you think I would run away—"

She broke off as Ma Heaney bustled into the room.

"Well, there's no harm done, thank the Lord!" she remarked cheerily. "That young squarehead will be out in a week and none the worse. I hear you've been look-

ing at that shack Mr. Hoyt was going to take for himself, Mr. Peddar. It's the best one around here. Bud Sawyer built it for himself just before he got in that little argument with the faro dealer at the Full Blast, and it ain't been occupied since."

"What is it like?" asked Jane eagerly.

Peddar shuddered.

"Three rooms that would hardly be called closets, and you can see through the walls," he responded gloomily. "No running water except what comes through a hole in the roof, tumble-down steps, no latch on the door, and the floor gives with every step. When I think of you in a place like that—"

"Oh, Big Jim 'll lend you a couple of men to put that right, and you can get a stove and pans and some bedding over at the miners' supply store," Ma Heaney interrupted briskly. "I can lend you a table and some chairs till you can order some up on the next trip of the Queen, and you'll be more comfortable than most up here. Time the flowers begin to grow—"

"Oh, is there a garden?" cried Jane. "That settles it, father. When can we move in?"

And it did settle it. In spite of Peddar's shocked remonstrances a few days later found them more or less snugly ensconced in the little shack, and even he was bound to admit that it was an improvement over their former quarters. Big Jim Bowers had fulfilled Ma Heaney's prediction, and his men did the rough carpentering well; the new stove did not smoke unduly, and a lone Chinaman was found in the town who would come in now and then and help with the work, which neither the new settler nor his daughter were capable of accomplishing.

In the warm sunshine which streamed out between the daily drizzle of rain, Jane's straggling little garden thrived amazingly, and more than one shy offer of help was made to her in varying dialects by the men who came to purchase their meager luxuries at the store.

She noted one slight but significant fact in the days which immediately followed the explosion. She had ceased to be "Miss Peddar." From the general superintendent down to the lowliest of the bull gang she

was "Miss Jane" to one and all except Barney Hoyt, and her heart warmed at the inference.

In all respect and deference they were taking her in, making her one of themselves, one of the outfit. That rash, unconsidered moment when she had, in all ignorance, rushed in where they had feared to go even to follow their chief, had placed her in their estimation where months of diplomatic kindliness in her store dealings with them would not have done, and she realized it vaguely but thankfully.

She was beginning to recognize faces in the slouching crowd; to remember strange, hardly pronounceable names, and to greet some of her customers with a personal word that brought a flush of pleasure to many a swarthy, Slavic brow. Often as she watched them, awkward, silent, and furtive-eyed through sheer embarrassment, she wondered who the traitor could be; the traitor of whom Jim Bowers was so sure, who must have disclosed the location of the dynamite to their enemies.

Back in the first days after her arrival, Jane would have unhesitatingly said that from appearances any of them might well have been capable of it; but she was learning discrimination; learning, however slowly, to read the grim courage and kindliness and chivalry that lay beneath the rough exterior.

It hurt her like an innuendo cast upon a friend to feel that any of the Northern Star outfit could betray his trust, and yet surely the superintendent's suspicions must have been well founded or he would not have made so positive a declaration.

The news of the higher grade stock and the importations added to it at the unheard-of prices had spread like wildfire, and had not Jud Pittinger carefully husbanded it and doled it out to her, it would all have been exhausted in the first few days, but save for that surreptitious visit of Malison, the superintendent of the Unatika Company, Jane could not ascertain that any of their rivals had risen to the bait.

A week passed with no further indications of trouble. The wharf and ore pockets were well on the way to completion, the pile-driver and crane were still, and

work had begun in earnest on the road. The clearing gang toiled night and day, excavating and grading; the steam-shovel chugged and rattled ceaselessly, and every afternoon when Jane, drawn by an irresistible fascination, stole out to see how the work was progressing, it seemed to her that the narrow, trail-like path, shored up and reclaimed from the soft mud and tundra, was lengthening itself slowly but surely, and stretching out toward the foothills. The miracle was coming to pass!

She saw little of Hoyt. He seemed to be on the job with every shift; sleeplessly, tirelessly vigilant, and lending his own strength in any emergency with a democratic *camaraderie* which yet brought with it no lessening of the strictest authority.

One afternoon on her return from watching the clearing gang at work, Jane found a bright-eyed, dark-skinned laborer loitering about the door of the store, but not until Jud's departure did he enter. Then he came deprecatingly up to the counter, and began fingering the sacks of tobacco.

Jane watched him curiously. She was sure that she had seen him before; even in the maze of faces which rose before her, there was something familiar and pathetically appealing in the wistful smile and soft, dark eyes. He was an Italian, of course, and probably on the night shift; yet she wondered to which of the gangs he belonged. Why had he hesitated to enter when Jud was there? Could it be that he was one of the rival outfit? Then all at once she recalled him and smiled.

"Did you like the silk handkerchief you bought last week?" she asked.

The man smiled with a flash of white teeth in his thin face.

"Yes-a, mees! I come for see-a de raze', de raze' in de little-a box."

He glanced over his shoulder and then eagerly back to her once more.

"You mean these?" Jane displayed the new razors in their ornate boxes, and the man took them up in his hand with almost childish pleasure. "They are two dollars, but we have some cheaper ones."

He shook his head at the suggestion, and selecting one, pulled out a slender roll of worn bills.

"This cut-a good," he announced, and, slipping it into his pocket, he turned to go, yet lingered.

"Wait a minute," Jane said on an impulse. "What is your name?"

The man hesitated, embarrassed.

"Name Pietro." He paused, and then came shyly toward her once more. "You like-a see my *bambino*. Got-a de pict, came last-a boat. I never see heem yet, me."

He took a cheap, card-mounted photograph from his pocket and thrust it into her hands. It was none too clean, and bore traces already of much handling; but Jane smiled warmly as she saw the face of a very young, very swarthy baby wrapped in a multitude of shawls.

"Oh, your baby!" she exclaimed. "And you've never seen it? It will be quite big when the road is finished and you go back."

The Italian's smile faded, and he averted his face as he took the little photograph from her.

"Yes-a beeg," he assented simply.

"It is a lovely baby!" Jane was touched by the lonely man's confidence. "You must tell me about it, and about your wife, some time, Pietro. Where are they?"

But Pietro was casting uneasy glances over his shoulder and sidling toward the door.

"Some-a time, mees, t'anks. I go now; late-a for de job."

He smiled wistfully once more, nodded, and was gone, while Jane began contemptively to pick up the remaining razors.

The man must be one of the Unatika outfit; his apprehensive glances at the door; his palpable furtiveness and haste, all betrayed him as an interloper. Yet he had been there before more than once, and he had ventured again just to show her his baby's picture, to gain a word of sympathy and friendliness in this strange, bleak land.

If she, in turn, had succeeded in gaining his liking, his friendship, and personal confidence had come, could she not later win his confidence in other things, in the machinations, perhaps of the company which employed him?

He had not looked like the sort of ruffian to be consciously engaged in the treacherous work afoot; yet he might be just stupid

enough to do blindly what he was told, and to reveal it with childlike candor later to any one whom he trusted. It might be that she had gained a foothold at last in the task which she had undertaken.

So absorbed was she in her cogitations that Jane did not observe when a tall figure darkened the doorway, nor glance up until a hated, well-remembered drawl fell upon her ears.

"Trade isn't very brisk to-day, is it, little lady?" Malison lounged familiarly over the counter, his curiously light eyes leering at her.

"Brisk enough," she responded shortly. "What do you want?"

"Nothing you've got to sell." He straightened and edged nearer. "Just a word with you. Look here, you got sore with me the other day, but let's forget it and be friends. I was only kidding, and you're the only girl around these diggings that I'd give a whoop for. I don't mind telling you that you've got me going, and I'm some hard to please. There ain't much a fellow can do to show a girl a good time up in a hole like this, but if you make up and shake hands on it, the next trip of the Queen will bring up for you from Seattle the prettiest—"

"No, thank you." Jane shook her head. "I'm not 'sore' at you, as you say. I am here to sell goods, but not to take any insolence, and I have no desire to shake hands with you. If you don't want to buy anything, please go."

"What a little spitfire!" He chuckled and made no move toward departure. "Mad still, are you? Danged if I don't like your spirit; but what's the talk of a kiss or two among friends? For we're going to be friends yet, little lady. I had my eye on you from the first day you landed, and if I started out wrong, why, I'm willing to admit it. Know what this is?"

He had reached into his pocket and tossed out upon the counter a small object which glinted with a myriad darts of fire.

"A diamond!" Jane exclaimed, startled in spite of herself at the incongruity of the thing there among the sacks of tobacco and boxes of razors.

"And a beauty!" Malison nodded.

"Found her myself in Brazil, and had her cut two years ago in Frisco. Haven't seen a girl yet I'd give it to until now, but if you say the word, it's yours."

He squared himself with an air of coming triumph, and Jane smiled.

"I don't want it. Please take it off the counter; it might get lost," she said. "Diamonds are a little out of place up here in Alaska, and if you want my friendship, you will have to be a little more respectful than you've been in the past, my good man."

The note of disdainful patronage was a momentary and wholly unconscious reversion to the Jane of the past, but Malison's face darkened evilly as he swept up his rejected peace offering and dropped it into his pocket.

"All right!" he muttered savagely. "But don't try any of your fine-lady airs on me! I know your kind, and I'll make you sorry for this before I'm through with you!"

For an instant he lowered threateningly at her; then his expression changed swiftly, and, turning, he strode from the store.

Jane gasped with relief, and then smiled rather tremulously as Jud appeared in the door. Malison's ear must have been quicker than her own to detect the approach of her ally.

"Say, was that there Malison in here again, Miss Jane?" demanded Jud. "He's about the worst feller hangs around this town, besides being a Unatika man."

"I told him to go, but I couldn't very well put him out, could I?" Jane asked. "I don't see how he dares come in here in broad daylight with all your people about; but I didn't let him know that I knew he wasn't one of our own men."

"Well, you can the next time he shows his sneakin' face in here, and mighty quick, too!" Jud growled in unaccustomed wrath. "Orders is orders, but I ain't goin' to have a feller like him pesterin' you, Miss Jane! That there gat behind the counter ain't any more use to you than it would be to a kitten, and if I wasn't a born fool I might 've knowed it; but I'm goin' to get you a watchman's whistle, and if he or anybody else bothers you, just you blow it. I'll tell

the boys that if I ain't around and they hear it, they are to come in and just naterally clean up the store."

"I guess I—I'd like to have it." Jane heard herself reply, to her own consternation, and she mentally berated her weakness. Had she not boasted that she could take care of herself? What had she to fear from that man's idle threats? The whole thing seemed absurdly melodramatic and unreal, now that he had gone; and rough as the town was, she had met with no molestation elsewhere, save in the store, where one scream would have brought practically the whole outfit swarming to her aid.

She put away the stock, told Jud of her single sale of the razor, and started home to supper with her little chin held very high. She would *not* be a miserable coward!

As she left the store, she paused for a moment to look down toward the waterfront where the wharf, deserted now by the hive of workmen who had swarmed over it only a week before, lay steaming in the sunlight after the recent rain. The ore-pockets which lined its outer edge cast sharp, deep shadows backward, and as Jane looked it seemed to her that a man darted from one to the other of the pockets. She could not be sure, the sun was so dazzling and the thick-set figure seemed to have moved so quickly.

Her first impulse was to call to Jud, but she reflected that it might be one of the watchmen on guard, and she did not want to appear officious. Jane decided to reconnoiter herself.

She walked slowly down to the wharf, her feet making no sound on the mud which had sloughed up between the loose boards of the sidewalk, and made her way around the ore-pocket at the end. No one was in sight, and she was on the point of concluding that her eyes must have deceived her when, as she neared the third pocket, a man came hastily around its corner and met her face to face.

For a moment they stood staring, then the man nodded surlily, and, putting his hands in his pockets, strolled past her with an elaborate assumption of nonchalance.

Jane stood motionless, watching until his shambling figure had crossed the wharf and

started up Main Street in the obvious direction of the Full Blast.

She was undecided what to do; his errand on the wharf might have been a perfectly legitimate one, and at the moment she herself had no right to be there. Undoubtedly he was an employee of the Northern Star; she had seen him in the store frequently and about the storage yard with the other members of the bull gang; and his face, with its lowering brow, near-set, deep-sunken eyes, and wide, high cheekbones was not one which could be easily forgotten, although she did not remember ever to have heard his name.

Even should she report his presence there, the girl doubted that she would be able to pick him out positively from so many other Russian and Slavic employees at the works if she were called upon to do so, and she resolved, for the time being, at least to keep her own counsel.

Yet as she made her way slowly home, a disquieting thought pervaded her consciousness and would not be exorcized. What if he were the still undiscovered man who had betrayed the location of the dynamite to their enemies, the traitor to the Northern Star?

CHAPTER XII.

PIETRO.

THE little side street upon which stood the shack where Peddar and Jane had taken up their abode began like a narrow alley, with ramshackle frame buildings standing shoulder to shoulder on either side, their porches crowding out over the single plank which served as a walk. Farther on, the houses thinned, with long gaps of open space between, and where the unfortunate Bud Sawyer had built his home only the deserted, tumble-down ruins of another shack, fifty feet away, bore it company.

As Jane passed it, her thoughts still busied with the man she had seen lurking in the shadows of the ore-pockets on the wharf, she heard a faint groan, which seemed to emanate from behind the heap of broken, weather-stained boards, and paused. The place was eery and deserted,

even in the paling light of the sun, which was already disappearing behind a murk of cloud once more; and the Janetta of a month ago would have taken promptly to her trim high heels, but now she hesitated.

If some one were ill or hurt, lying there all alone, some one of her outfit— Even as the thought came to her she heard another groan, deeper and more prolonged than before, and waiting no longer, she picked her way through the oozing mud around to the back of the ruined shack.

A man was lying there, his limbs twisted as through pain, both arms crooked over his face and head as if to ward off a blow; and as she stood looking at him, a sort of broken sob tore its way through his throat.

"Oh, what is it—what's the matter?" Jane asked pityingly, and then shrank back in horrified amazement as the man's arms dropped and he essayed to rise. His face was bloody and battered almost beyond recognition, one eye blackened and closed, and a deep, hideous gash ran across his cheek-bone.

"Mees!" The word came in a sobbing gulp, and as he fell back again she saw that the knuckles of both hands were abraded to mere pulp. "Mees! Please—a you go! No place—a for you. Maybe he come—a back!"

"Pietro!" In spite of his mangled countenance, there was no mistaking that soft voice, wistful even in pain. It was the lonely little Italian who had shown her the picture of his *bambino* only an hour or two before in the store. "Pietro, what has happened to you? Who has hurt you like this?"

There was silence for a minute, the silence of a race which keeps its own counsel and seeks its own revenge. Then, reluctantly, through set teeth, came the single word:

"Malison."

A partial light broke over Jane, and with an involuntary shudder she glanced about her, but no one was in sight, and she said decisively:

"I can't leave you here like this, Pietro, and I won't! Come! Try to get up and lean on me. My own home is near by, and we must get the company doctor—"

"No-a doc! I not your company. I Unatika—"

"I know that," Jane responded quietly. "It doesn't matter, though; you must have some help. Try, Pietro."

The wretched man made a determined effort, but his breath caught in a tearing sob, and with one hand clasped to his side he fell back once more.

"He kick-a me in de reeb after I fall-a down." The voice came faintly, as if ashamed of the confession. "Please-a go, mees! He come-a back, maybe keel you. He bad-a man!"

"He's a great, big, blustering coward!" Jane cried indignantly, for the pitiable condition of the little Italian wrung her heart. "I can't get you up alone by myself, but you just lie here quietly for a minute and I'll bring my father. Don't try to move; your face is bleeding so!"

She turned up the skirt of her dress, tore a wide strip from her petticoat, and gently pressed it over the gash in his cheek; then turned and plunged off heedlessly through the mud.

Suppose Malison should return to finish the work he had so brutally commenced? She could have no inkling of the quarrel between the two, but there was no thought now of self-interest in attempting to gain Pietro's friendship; the wistful little man had appealed irresistibly to her sympathies in the afternoon, and now she felt that they were leagued against a common enemy. She must get help, and quickly.

To Peddar, bending his dignified back over the uncongenial task at the stove there entered a veritable whirlwind, which seized him and bore him through the door and breathlessly along in the mud, replying to his vociferous protestations by utterly incomprehensible allusions to some one who was badly hurt and some one else who ought to be shot, and ending with the imperative and impossible injunction to "hurry."

When at length they reached the recumbent figure, Peddar drew back in horror.

"Oh, miss; it's murder as has been done! Whatever are you mixing up in it for? Come straight away and leave him to the—"

"It's not! He has been terribly beaten, and we are going to take him home and help him!" Jane declared. "I—I know him; he is a friend of mine."

"A friend!" Peddar groaned. "If Mr. Geddes could hear you, miss, I'm sure I don't know what he would say; I don't indeed! And as for taking him home—"

"You kneel down there, *father*, and slip your arm under his shoulders," Jane ordered briefly. "I don't give a—whoop what Mr. Geddes or anybody else would say, and you ought to know it by now! Don't mind about your clothes getting muddy; help him up, I say! Come, Pietro, try to help us."

Pietro only moaned faintly, but between them they managed to get him upon his feet, although it was evident that he was on the point of absolute collapse. He set his teeth, but groan after groan forced its way from him during the brief journey, and even Peddar's protestations were shocked to silence by the man's evident suffering.

They eased him down upon the cot in the kitchen, and Jane tore a sheet into strips for bandages, while Peddar heated water on the stove, and forced some brandy between the man's bruised lips.

He murmured broken, incoherent expressions of gratitude for their ministrations, and then lapsed into silence; but as Jane was completing the bandage about his battered head, he started up from the cot in sudden alarm.

Jane's eyes followed his frightened glance to the door as she rose slowly to her feet. Barney Hoyt stood on the threshold.

"Good evening," he said. "I—what has happened?"

"A friend of mine has been hurt," Jane explained briefly. "Come, Pietro, lie down again. Mr. Hoyt won't hurt you."

Uninvited, Hoyt entered and, walking to the cot, looked down upon the man for a moment in silence. When he spoke again there was a curiously repressed note in his voice.

"He isn't one of our outfit."

"No. He is employed by the Unatika people," Jane added. "Come out on the porch with me while Peddar attends to his side, and I will explain."

Hoyt followed her in a non-committal silence, and when she seated herself upon the steps and made room for him shyly beside her, he did not accept the mute invitation, but stood leaning against the rough, spruce post which upheld the shaky roof, and waited for her to speak.

"You see, he's been buying things at the store—tobacco and handkerchiefs and that sort of thing—and I didn't know until to-day that he didn't belong to the Northern Star outfit," Jane began, angry at herself for proffering the explanation, and still angrier at her companion for making her feel that one was necessary.

"When he came in to-day he seemed so furtive and hurried, and so afraid that some one would come in and find him there, that I could not help noticing it; but Mr. Pettinger had told me to sell to any one who came in, no matter who, without asking if they belonged to our outfit or not. I sold him a razor, and he showed me his baby's picture, and seemed so lonesome and longing for a friendly word, like a—*a* dog that had been abused, that I felt sorry for him."

She paused, but Hoyt merely said quietly:

"Go on, please. How does he come to be here?"

"I—I found him just now back of that tumble-down shack in the next lot, groaning terribly, and with his face all beaten in. He said that Malison had done it, and had kicked him, too, when he was down! Just to see if my suspicions about him were correct, I told him I would get the company doctor, and he told me frankly that he did not belong to the Northern Star outfit, but to the Unatika."

Jane paused and added: "I haven't been able to find out from him yet what the trouble was about; but I think it must have had something to do with his coming to our store, for just after he left to-day, Malison himself came in, and he—he was impertinent."

"To you? What did he say?" Hoyt's voice was sterner than she had ever heard it, and Jane replied hurriedly:

"Oh, nothing worth repeating. He was trying to make friends with me, I think; but I don't like him, and besides, he be-

longs to the outfit that has brought all this trouble to the Northern Star."

"Yet you take another Unatika man into your home." Hoyt spoke with no suggestion of accusation, but as if he were trying to understand, and Jane drew a deep breath.

"Well, you see, Mr. Hoyt, he seemed so sort of pathetically anxious for a friendly word and so lonely this afternoon that I thought he might be approachable in time, if I gave him cause to be grateful to me."

"Approachable?" The young engineer seated himself suddenly on the step beside her and looked directly into her eyes. "Just what do you mean, Miss Peddar?"

"Simply that if there is a traitor in our camp, as Mr. Bowers says, it might be as well to have a friend in theirs," Jane added hastily. "I don't mean to meddle with things which do not concern me, Mr. Hoyt, but this Pietro doesn't seem to be a bad sort, and a lonely man will sometimes tell things to a girl who is sympathetic and has been kind to him that he would not let slip to a man in the other organization."

"I know it sounds despicable, but it's only fighting fire with fire, and after that poor boy was hurt in that explosion last week I thought almost any means would be fair enough to use if it would be possible to learn their plans or something that would directly implicate them."

"By Jove, you are right, and it was a very clever idea of yours!" Hoyt caught himself up and added deliberately. "If it was your idea, Miss Peddar?"

He put the remark in the form of so unmistakable a question that Jane faced him squarely with widened eyes.

"Why, of course! Who in the world would have suggested it to me?" she asked, with an assumption of perfect candor, reflecting inwardly that she was at least telling the literal truth. It had been her own idea from its inception in those far-off days in New York.

"I know I am only employed to tend store, but I thought that if there were anything else which I might do to help without meddling too much, no one would object. We—we're all just working together, aren't we?"

"That's the spirit!" Hoyt rose, his eyes shining, and held out his hand. "Object? Miss Peddar, I would be only too thankful to you if you can learn anything which would help us to circumvent these scoundrels! I don't mind telling you that there may be grave trouble ahead; they are hindering us more than appears on the surface, and they are only waiting for us to do something lawless in retaliation in order to get the marshal from Juneau and stop our work altogether. But I will go in now, with your permission, and have a look at your patient to see if that brute Malison has injured him seriously."

Jane waited, gazing out over the bleak, dismal prospect to the foot-hills beyond with dreamy eyes. She was no longer angry, but rather glad of the interview, glad that she had explained her position to this masterful and yet singularly attractive young man. To him, of course, she was merely a little shop-girl, and he must believe that the idea of worming herself into Pietro's confidence had only occurred to her on the spur of the moment.

He had approved, he had trusted her, and his hand-clasp had been the most encouraging and comforting thing that had happened to her since her arrival. It was odd, she reflected, how a little thing like that, a mere gesture from one of her own employees could so hearten her for the task which all unknown to him lay before her. If he, with his queer socialistic ideas, had suspected whom she was, of course, he wouldn't have shaken hands with her for anything!

He was frankly friendly with her because he thought her merely a working girl, and he had been proud to declare himself only a working man, and yet he wasn't at all. There was something of the unmistakable university breeding which would crop out, something beneath the purposely assumed roughness of his bearing which told her that if not actually of her own world he was at least beyond the class to which he almost defiantly allied himself.

Of course, perfectly nice young men of good family became construction engineers, but they would try to appear at their best, to raise, not lower, themselves, and she

shrewdly suspected that they would look largely and patronizingly down upon a girl who came to a rough Alaskan town to work in a mining company's store. It was all very puzzling.

Peddar came to the door and roused her.

"J-Jane," he stammered, mindful for once of the listeners within. "Mr. Hoyt thinks I had better walk down with the man to Mrs. Heaney's. He can't get out to his own company's bunk-houses to-night, and that's the only place for him to stay. Mrs. Heaney is rather down on that other company, and I understand I shall have to persuade her to take him in."

Peddar's tone suggested no pleasure at the prospect, but Jane ignored it.

"His own bunk-houses?" she repeated. "You don't mean to say he is going back—"

"Yes. He says he must work as soon as he is able until pay-day, so as to get the money that is coming to him, if I can understand his lingo, and then he will go home. Mr. Hoyt offered him a place on the Northern Star, but he says they would kill him; the other people, I mean!" Peddar's voice had lowered with horror. "I—I'm sure I hope they don't offer him any violence on the way to Mrs. Heaney's, seeing him with me and knowing we are connected with the company here, as you might say."

"Of course they won't, father; don't be silly!" Jane rose and turned to enter the shack. "Is he really able to go? His ribs aren't broken or anything?"

It was Hoyt who answered her.

"Not broken, but very badly bruised. He has taken a terrific beating, but I can't get out of him what it was all about."

Pietro, his swarthy skin pale beneath the bandages, was sitting on the side of the cot, and as he turned a grateful eye upon the girl his swollen lips moved.

"He mad-a at me, maybe beat-a, too, if he know," he muttered, gesturing with one white swathed hand toward the engineer.

"No, Pietro, I'm sure he won't be angry, and I know he wouldn't hurt you if he were," Jane responded encouragingly. "Was it because you bought things from our store that Malison attacked you?"

Pietro nodded respectfully, half fearfully.

"I bring them all-a back, all-a but de raze!" he said eagerly. "I no right to buy off-a you, but our stuff no good, big-a price. Malison, he see me dis-a afternoon. I see heem go your store, too, but he come-a out queek and verra mad, black-a de look. He see me show de raze' one our boys, he come after me, tak-a de raze' away and do to me whatta you see. I theenk I die you no come feex-a me up, mees. I no t'ank-a you, I no *can* t'ank—"

"That is quite all right, Pietro, and you need not return the things you bought. I am only glad that you feel stronger now and are not in such pain." Jane smiled at him. "My father will go with you to Ma Heaney's, and see that she takes you in. I sincerely hope that you will not have any more trouble with your superintendent."

Pietro shrugged.

"I taka de chance," he observed philosophically. "When I getta my pay I quitta de comp'; no good, not on de square."

Jane waited with a little catch in her breath, but he said no more, and she dared not question him in the presence of Hoyt lest she lose what confidence the Italian might have placed in her.

When he had departed, leaning heavily upon Peddar's arm, she turned to the engineer.

"You will stay and have supper with us, won't you? My father isn't a very good cook, I am afraid, but we have lots of canned things, and we would be so glad to have you."

He shook his head smilingly.

"Thank you, but I can only stay until your father comes home," he replied.

"I suppose it wouldn't do," she murmured mischievously. "It wouldn't be the thing for the chief of the Northern Star Company to accept the hospitality of the humblest of his employees."

To her surprise he did not respond in like tone to her raillery.

Instead his face darkened again and he said almost fiercely:

"You know that isn't the reason! Do you take me for a snob, Miss Peddar?"

Position and place make no difference up here, thank God; it is the work that counts. But I've got to get back to the job."

"It's progressing, isn't it?" Jane asked. "The other people have done nothing to interfere with you since the explosion, have they? I wish they would let me go to see that poor boy, but the doctor said it would not be establishing a good precedent."

"Hansen is coming along nicely, and we will have him back at work in a few days now."

Hoyt paused and then turned to her with a curious boyish impetuosity:

"I don't suppose you have any idea of it, Miss Peddar, but I want to tell you how much you did for me that day when you followed me to that demolished shack where the men themselves were actually afraid to go."

Jane smiled.

"I didn't know there was any danger," she said, with naive honesty. "They shouted to me, but I didn't stop to hear what they said, or even to think."

"No," he repeated. "You didn't stop to hear or even to think, and when Jud Pittinger asked you why you had walked straight into danger, you said it was because I had gone. Do you realize what effect that had upon the men themselves? That you, a newcomer on the job, a mere girl, would follow where I led, unquestioningly, while they held back?"

"I suppose I was fairly successful with them before that, but I am a comparative newcomer myself, you know, and although they acknowledged my authority and seemed to like me in a sort of way, I did not know how far I could trust them for absolute loyalty in a crisis."

"You shamed them, Miss Peddar, and I think if I know men that they would follow me now into the very jaws of disaster."

"If they would, it is only your own personality which has done it, Mr. Hoyt." Jane turned away to hide her glowing eyes. "I hope they are loyal, but if there is really a traitor among them—"

"I am afraid there can be no question of that." Hoyt's face grew swiftly grave once more. "So many of these so-called accidents have occurred at or near the time

when they could do us the most harm, that they must be obtaining inside information from some source. Bowers and I have talked with the men and studied them, but we cannot be sure, and it is a pretty rotten thing to hold an innocent man under suspicion."

"Tell me," Jane spoke quickly as a sudden thought returned to her. "Who should have been around the wharf and the ore-pockets this afternoon, an hour or so ago?"

"No one but the watchman." Hoyt glanced at her in surprise.

"Is he a Russian or Slav? A thick-set man, with sunken eyes close together, and high cheek-bones?"

"No. He's Pat Culhane, a big, blond Irishman." Hoyt's tone had quickened, too. "Why do you ask? You didn't see such a man as you describe hanging about there, did you?"

Jane nodded, and told him briefly of the incident of the afternoon. He listened quietly, but when she had finished he rose and began to pace the floor.

"That description might fit any one of twenty men on the job," he remarked at last. "You are sure he is one of our outfit?"

"Oh, yes. He has been in the store half a dozen times with the others since I came, and I think I have noticed him working over in the storage-yard."

"One of the bull gang, eh? Would you know him again if you saw him, Miss Peddar?"

"Yes, if I came face to face with him I think I should, but I couldn't possibly point him out from among the rest," Jane responded doubtfully. "Of course, I may have been unduly suspicious of his actions—"

"He had no right on the wharf, whoever he was," Hoyt declared. "When he comes into the store again, get his name if you can, please. I wonder"—he eyed her quizzically—"I wonder if this Mr. Mac-Leod, who has your references, really sent you up here just to tend store!"

Jane laughed frankly.

"He was rather dubious about my ability to do even that satisfactorily after my rather limited previous experience, but I begged

so hard for the position that he finally engaged me."

"Why were you so anxious to come?" He had halted before her, but after one flashing, mischievous glance she averted her eyes.

"To see what it was like up here, of course, and then father was so wild to get to Alaska himself—"

A deferential cough from the doorway made them both turn. Peddar had executed his mission.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PREMONITION.

THE next morning when Jane came down Main Street toward the store in time for the seven o'clock shift she noticed idly that several men seemed to be patrolling the wharf, but her thoughts were busied with Pietro and his plight, and she gave little heed.

Jud Pittinger met her at the door with an oddly grim look about his usually smiling mouth, and it occurred to her that his ruddy countenance had paled.

"Has anything happened, Mr. Pittinger?" she asked.

For answer he took her arm and, turning her around, pointed to the wharf.

"You see them men, Miss Jane?" he demanded.

"Why, of course. What are they doing?"

"Lockin' the stable door!" Jud replied cryptically. "Only this time the horse wasn't stole first."

"What do you mean?" Jane's mind flashed back to her conversation of the previous night with the engineer.

"Them rascals was layin' to blow up the wharf, same as they did the dynamite shack last week, that's all!" Jud retorted. "Beats all tarnation how they manage to lay their wires right before our noses and no one gettin' on to 'em, but last night Mr. Hoyt come down here and found 'em all fixed ready to attach the sticks."

"Come dark, or what passes for dark up here between one and three, and they would have finished the job and touched

her off, as sure as you're born, and when you come down this mornin', Miss Jane, me and the store would 've been out in the middle of the bay; what was left of us, that is."

"But the watchman!" Jane stammered. "Where was he?"

"Snorin' like a bull alongside the third pocket. Said he only took one nip out of his flask, though even that ain't allowable, of course, and just keeled over. Looks like he was tellin' the truth, too, for when the doc examined his flask there wasn't more 'n one drink gone out of it, but the red-eye that was left was doped for fair: somebody must have got at it in the bunk-house and there don't any Unatika fellers dast poke their noses in there."

"One of our own men!" Jane exclaimed. It was on the tip of her tongue to mention the one she had seen skulking about on the previous afternoon, but she thought better of it. Hoyt had known, and he had not taken the loyal but garrulous little store-keeper into his confidence.

"I'd like to get my hands on him!" Jud growled. "It's bad enough to have a bunch of ornery coyotes like that other gang hangin' around to run us out of town, without a skunk in our own yard! When they find him the boys will just about eat him alive!"

Still voicing his wrath, he turned the books over to his assistant, and went to the mess-house for breakfast, and when the morning shift changed and the men came drifting in for tobacco and soap, Jane scrutinized each face carefully as she waited upon them, but the swarthy, sunken-eyed loungee of the wharf did not put in an appearance.

There were so many who did resemble him, however, that she despaired more than ever of being able to point him out, and as the morning wore on she felt a sense of dejection and discouragement stealing over her. To have seen the man and not be able to identify him had not been of much service to Barney Hoyt, after all, or surely he would have come in to tell her so, no matter how busy he might be.

All unconsciously she watched the door, but only the track-layers and road-builders

of the last shift came for supplies, and when Jud relieved her she went slowly home to dinner through the everlasting drizzle with a sense of disappointment which she would not admit even to herself.

After all, she was only masquerading up here. In a month or two, if the road went through, she would go back and be Janetta Gildersleeve once more, and dance and play bridge and drive her car and forget that there was such a hateful, rainy, lonesome place as Katalak on the map! Why should it matter to her whether this young engineer, this hireling of hers and her brother's came to thank her for warning him of the man on the wharf or not? She had not done it for him, thank goodness, but for herself and Ollie, to protect their own interests. Why was she so silly as to bother about him anyway?

She found the midday meal, which in courtesy they called dinner, only half cooked, and Peddar in a sadly agitated condition.

"Oh, miss, there's been a man here to see you, a horrible person, if you don't mind my saying so."

When they were alone together Peddar frequently reverted to the original status which had existed between them in more normal days, and although the girl usually corrected him sharply to keep him in practice, she had not the heart to do so now at sight of his perturbed face.

"Who was it, Peddar? Don't rattle the stove-lids like that!"

"I don't know, miss, but he said he was a friend of yours, and he asked me questions that I wouldn't have answered if I could; I'd call them personal even up here, miss." Peddar's tone trembled with indignation. "As for the stove-lids, I'm that shaky I can hardly hold them! He came in and sat down without being invited, and when he saw that you wasn't here and he couldn't get anything out of me—for I as much as up and told him to go at last—he turned ugly."

Jane felt an odd, sinking feeling in her breast, but she would not for worlds have let Peddar know the premonition which his words had brought to her mind.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Second-Seer



by Edwin Dial Torgerson

RUTH MAUVE had come to town. There was no doubt about it. The billboards proclaimed it colorfully, and the newspapers shamelessly announced that she was a marvelous telepathist, mind-reader, clairvoyant, second-sight prodigy, and genius generally.

Chief of Police Broggan was among the first to hear of it officially. The mayor called him up personally, at the behest of the license inspector, who wanted to know whether Ruth Mauve's performance came under the head of amusements or scientific expositions.

The city, it seemed, exempted of license all educational, charitable or scientific entertainments, but amusements *per se*, including dog and pony shows and cabarets, were taxed one hundred dollars a year whether they stayed one year or one day.

Ruth Mauve paid the maximum and got in good with the license inspector, but the chief of police wanted to make sure it wasn't a fake show for the benefit of Bog Juice or some other medicinal builder of wasted lives, so he attended the first performance in person.

Ruth Mauve was extremely sensitive to impressions. The slightest exterior antagonism disturbed her, and when there was noise in the audience her all-seeing spirit was handicapped and she could not read your mind fluently. She was a creature of temperament if ever there was one, on the stage or elsewhere.

She sat behind the dimmed footlights, blindfolded. One of her agents walked noiselessly on non-skid heels through the awe-stricken audience, and collected—

Well, Ruth Mauve had a system of reading your private and clandestine thoughts, of delving into the past, and adventuring into the future, of answering questions about your long-lost relatives or dollars, of giving you advice about your wife or your husband or other valuables—provided you wrote your inquiry on a pad furnished by her representative in the audience.

The questions, sealed in little envelopes, were shuffled pell-mell in the hat used by the collector, the assistant telepathist waved each of the messages mystically over Ruth's coiffure, and then, one by one, she came *en rapport* with each of her questioners, and answered the difficult queries, one by one.

Chief Broggan sat silent and unconvinced while a series of these inquiries were receiving attention.

He admitted that her replies were accurate, but he reserved to himself the conviction that there was a trick in it. He could have testified to the fact that his friend James McPhorran was a barber and that he had shaved a certain prominent banker on this particular day, and that the banker had given him a fifty-cent tip.

The chief did not regard it as improbable, either, that McPhorran would find his lost scissors if he would look in the pocket

of his old white coat. Even Bodoni, the fruit vendor, got an illuminating answer to the effect that his wife Rosa could sell bananas faster than he could, if he only would leave her alone. But there was a trick in it, somewhere.

The chief, becoming impatient and curious, wrote a question himself. He watched the hat-bearer carefully, saw him mount the short steps to the stage, lay the derby down for a moment while he readjusted Ruth Mauve's blindfold, and then take up the hat again, extracting therefrom divers and sundry written inquiries, which he waved successively over the head of the medium. The chief signed only his initials to the question. He waited skeptically while other people's minds were being read, and had begun to feel personally assured that Ruth Mauve was a fake, when she announced excitedly:

"I am in touch with B! I am in touch with G. G. B.!"

The chief of police shivered violently.

"G. G. B. holds a responsible position in public life," continued the telepathist. "But he does not want it known that he has propounded a question. He is ashamed of appearing superstitious. I—"

While the medium paused, Chief Broggan had the unpleasant impression that he was the cynosure of several hundred eyes. He actually felt himself blushing.

"I shall not call his name," Ruth Mauve resumed, "because he seeks to deceive me, to keep his identity secret. He asks: 'Shall I be reappointed?' My answer, G. G. B., is—you will be reappointed if you overcome the influence of a certain man high in your organization who is secretly your enemy. He is seeking to prevent your reappointment. He hopes to get your position himself."

The chief had enough.

As soon as another question had been proposed and was being answered by the astounding Ruth Mauve, he rose inconspicuously from his seat and sought the outer air. It was good, too. He felt that he wasn't blushing any more. He could not remember having blushed ever before in his career, and he was thoroughly mortified over his exhibition of weakness, merely be-

cause this Ruth Mauve had happened to guess—

Had she guessed?

Who was the plotter, "high in your organization," of whom she had warned him?

The chief was profoundly puzzled. He had jailed many a burglar, many a yeggman, many a pickpocket, many a dangerous and suspicious character. He knew life as it was written on the docket at police headquarters, but he'd be durned if he had ever come across a proposition like this. Even if there had been some trick about the pad on which he wrote his question, how could this stranger guess his name, his position, his private business?

At police headquarters he was relieved to find Chief of Detectives Arthur C. Bendleworth, a sleuth of no mean scientific knowledge.

"Do you know anything about telepathy, Arthur?" queried the chief of police, nervously.

"Sure," grinned Bendleworth. "I arrested three fortune tellers last week who claimed to be telepathics, but they didn't have anything but a greasy pack of cards each, and no license at all. Of course, I couldn't say how many superstitious fools they had stung, but they didn't have any license to tell fortunes, and that was enough."

"Well, I want you to investigate this Ruth Mauve," said the chief, dodging the sting in Bendleworth's words. "She's paid her license, but she knows too damn much to be an ordinary crook. You've got to watch her, or she'll kidnap your wife and children and sell them for Egyptian mummies. She's got a stand down at the Majestic Theater."

The chief of detectives took it upon himself to investigate Ruth Mauve. He went in person to her next public séance, but he did not notice that Chief of Police Broggan was sitting unobserved in the rear of the audience.

Bendleworth waited, bored and impatient, while numerous inquiries written by the spectators were answered mysteriously by the seer. Then he wrote a question on a blank card, purposely not using the pad provided by Ruth Mauve's agent, and

merely signing it "A. C. B." This was his query:

"Do you know that you can be sent to jail for pulling this fake stuff? Do you know that the officers of the law are watching you?"

There was an awesome silence, while the assistant was waving a certain message over the head of Ruth Mauve. She grabbed at the air with her little fingers, and seemed to be having difficulty in getting connection.

"I am in touch with—with B.," she announced, in agitation.

Two officers of the law squirmed uneasily in their respective seats.

"I am in touch with A. C. B.—Bender, Benson, Bendle—oh, I cannot get it!" cried Ruth Mauve. "There is a hostile influence which makes it difficult. I feel at once that he is skeptical, that he does not trust me, that he doubts the efficacy of my powers. But I feel that he is here as the agent of G.—of G. G. B. Is that right, B? Oh, answer me!"

Bendleworth, silent and astounded, did not dare to answer.

"He does not reply! It is hard to establish the proper bond of sympathetic thought with skeptical persons, but the question that he sends to me is—'Do you know that the officers of the law are watching you?' I reply: B., do you know that you, also, are being watched? Go to your superior, if you dare, and tell him that you are conspiring against him."

Chief of Police Broggan crouched low in his seat while Chief of Detectives Bendleworth was leaving the theater. Next day he asked his aid carelessly what he thought of Ruth Mauve.

"Fake, pure and simple!" sneered Bendleworth. "You ought to run her out of town! They work it some way with the trick pad they use, and some local guy tips them off about who's in the audience. Then they've probably got a bunch of confederates in the audience who swear she's answered them right. It's criminal to let a mountebank like that rob the people."

"All right," said Broggan. "You get the evidence, and we'll act. But I understand the mayor went around to her show

and came away all enthusiastic about her. He says there's no fake to this telepathy business."

"The mayor's a bright lad, he is!"

A prison trusty came to the door of the chief's office.

"Lady to see you, sir," he said. "Her name is Miss Ruth Movie, or something."

The chief of police and the chief of detectives exchanged glances.

"Show her in," Broggan directed. "I guess we can talk to her for a minute."

The lady who was ushered in wore a gown of shimmering gray, and a veil of the same color which gave her eyes a baffling, elusive expression.

"I am Ruth Mauve," said the visitor. "Is this the chief of police?"

Chief Broggan nudged nervously closer to Bendleworth, whom she had addressed.

"This is the chief of police. What can I do for you?"

"I have come to consult you upon an important matter."

"Maybe she's lost a diamond ring, and wants us to give it the second-sight once-over for her," snickered Bendleworth.

The telepathist turned her shining eyes upon the chief of detectives, and all at once his face went red.

"I've got to be going, chief," he added hastily. Then he reached for his hat and made an unceremonious exit.

"I don't know that man," said Ruth Mauve slowly. "But, immediately I came into his presence, I was inspired with distrust. It may be wrong to say it, but intuition calls to me from within like a voice through a megaphone."

"That is Chief of Detectives Bendleworth, who—"

"Ah, I have met him then," interrupted the girl. "I felt sure I had been in contact with him mentally. He asked me an impertinent question the other night, concealing his name from me, but signing the initials A. C. B."

"Your memory's a regular encyclopedia," gasped the chief.

"I forget nothing. I do not forget, for instance, that you inquired of me whether or not you would be reappointed. I do not forget that I gave you a warning, but I am

in doubt whether or not you understood, and that is why I am here."

Chief Broggan was oppressed by a spooky influence: What supernatural power gave this woman detailed information about his personal affairs? If she could read one thing in his mind, why not another, perhaps more embarrassing thing?

He shifted uncomfortably in his revolving desk-chair.

"Have you—have you something more to tell me?"

"I experienced a strong presentiment the night Bendleworth was in the audience, that you were in a position that required immediate action," she replied earnestly. "There is some one near you, a trusted associate, who is conspiring to wrong you. That is all the warning that I can give, but the impulse to voice it was so insistent that I came to see you."

"Don't you know his—his name?" whispered the chief hoarsely.

"I do not. I have tried long and vainly to fashion this thought into intelligible words, but all I can say is that you must watch those around you."

The chief mopped his brow.

"There is one more thing!" she added suddenly. "There is a thought impulse that suggests Fourth—Fourth Ward. That's it! An alderman, and Honduras! Is there an alderman from the Fourth Ward in Honduras?"

Chief Broggan grew pale with amazement.

"What the devil do *you* know about *that*?" he demanded, dumfounded.

Ruth Mauve smiled vaguely.

"The trouble is, I don't know enough! But there seems an instinctive voice telling me that an alderman from the Fourth Ward is connected in some way with this underhanded enemy of yours. If you ever have occasion to refer to what I have said, I feel that it would be profitable to you."

Broggan shook her hand dazedly when she departed. He felt the magnetism of her presence long after she had gone.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he recapitulated, after a while. "I never took any stock in dreams and fortune tellers, but this one—gosh!"

He pondered at length over what she had told him. He could conceive of no one "high in his organization," who could be plotting against him—least of all Bendleworth, to whom Ruth Mauve seemed to have taken a bitter dislike. He could not connect the missing Fourth Ward alderman—a forgotten absconder who had made away with the funds of a certain bank, seven years ago—with this uncanny affair.

The police commission was expected very shortly to announce the reappointment of the chief of police. Broggan had no reason to doubt that he would be retained, but Ruth Mauve had conjured up a shadow of uncertainty. What influence, if any, was being brought to bear to rob him of his reappointment? Who could it—

Bang! Chief Broggan's ample feet came to the floor with the emphasis of inspiration.

He reached for the telephone and snapped out a number.

"Is this the office of the police commission?" he growled. "The secretary? All right. This is the office of Bendleworth, chief of detectives. Look up that application for me, will you?"

He waited stolidly until the voice came back on the wire.

"Did you want a copy of the charges, too?" asked the secretary of the police commission.

"Charges? Oh, yes. Everything. Send them right over, will you?"

Chief Broggan crumpled back into his chair and scowled menacingly at the wall.

"So it's Bendleworth!" he muttered. "The dirty dog! And I raised him from a pup!"

The messenger from the police commission arrived very shortly with a fat envelope for Chief of Detectives Bendleworth.

"Is Chief Bendleworth in?" he inquired.

"No, you can leave it," grumbled the chief of police. "He'll be here pretty soon."

Broggan waited, a volcano of wrath on the verge of eruption.

Presently the door opened, and Bendleworth casually walked in.

"Well, chief," he greeted heartily, "did you get through with the fortune teller?"

"Sit down," commanded Broggan gruffly.

Bendleworth took a seat opposite the

chief's chair, and strove to look unconcerned.

"This yours?" demanded Broggan, holding out the heavy envelope.

"What is it?"

Bendleworth took the package gingerly.

"Open it and see."

Chief Broggan watched him grimly while he explored the envelope.

Bendleworth flushed and paled.

"Where did you—get this?" he blustered.

"This is my affair!"

"And mine!" The chief's jaw bulged forward. "You're going to withdraw that application—and those charges! Get me?"

Bendleworth groped helplessly for the proper word.

"I guess I won't," he snapped. "If it's a show-down between us, all right! You can answer those charges before the police commission."

"You're going to withdraw those lying charges!" shouted Chief Broggan, pounding angrily on the desk. "Either that, or you're going to explain what you know about a certain Fourth Ward alderman who went to Honduras!"

The effect upon Bendleworth was electrical. He looked furtively at Broggan, shifted his eyes to the documents in his hand, and all at once lost his affected air of *sang froid*.

"Who's been telling you—that—chief?"

"Never mind who! I knew there was hush money in that affair. I knew there was graft in this department. And now I've got the dope! Say!" He leaned closer to Bendleworth and hissed: "Do you want to go to San Francisco to-night? I hear there's a good opening out there, for the right man."

Bendleworth's face lighted hopefully.

"Sure, chief! You're a sport! I know I did you dirt, but I'm sorry as hell for it. I'll retract those charges! I'll tell 'em I lied!"

"Write it now!" commanded Chief of Police Broggan.

So it came to pass that Arthur C. Bendleworth, former chief of detectives, went Far West on the midnight train.

Ruth Mauve was bringing to a close a marvelously successful engagement of two

weeks, at the Majestic Theater. Everybody in town was talking about her amazing performances. Everybody was convinced of her supernatural powers, from Chief Broggan, recently reappointed head of the police department, on down to the stage hands who helped her arrange for her act. With one exception—

William Togley, some time street-car motorman, bartender, private detective, and recently a member of the International Union of Theatrical Stage Employees, waited on Ruth Mauve and her manager.

"Now I want my rake-off," he announced coolly. "You've paid me a fair salary while you've been here, but I've done work for you that nobody else in the world could have done. I even fixed it so you could get in strong with the police. I want one thousand dollars bonus, or up goes your little show in the air!"

Ruth Mauve's manager, a sophisticated box-office savant, was used to dealing with disaffected employees of Togley's type.

"Now listen," he argued. "We've been decent to you. We've paid you one hundred dollars a week for working four hours a day, and pretty light work at that. You don't think we're running a moving-picture joint, do you? I'll give you a hundred extra, just to show you I'm a good fellow."

"You'll give me a thousand!"

"You go to hell," urged Ruth Mauve's manager.

Ruth Mauve went to the next town one night earlier than anticipated, and William Togley went to the chief of police.

Broggan recognized him, after the stage assistant had helped him refresh his memory.

"Sure, I was on the force," said Togley. "I mopped up, too, till that dirty loafer Bendleworth fired me."

"Well? Want another job?"

Togley grinned.

"Naw. I want to put you in to something rich. It'll make you strong with everybody in town. It might make you nationally famous."

"What you trying to hand me?"

"Just this: Ruth Mauve's a damn crook and a fake, and I'm the only guy that can prove it. She couldn't no more read your

mind than she could read Chinese. She's tricked you, and the mayor and everybody else, into believing she was a bear-cat at telepathy. She's just a plain telephone girl, and a crook at that!"

"Hey, now, just a minute!" interrupted the chief. "You can't tell me anything about Ruth Mauve. There was another gink tried to say what you're saying about her, and he got in bad. She's a clever little woman, and a friend of mine. I know her personally."

"But you don't know how she works her telepathy stunt," said Togley, unperturbed. "You think all she's gotta do is to 'concentrate,' and wave her fingers through the atmosphere and get *on report* with you. Look at this, chief!"

Togley produced from his pocket a copper plate, a coil of fine insulated wire and a miniature telephone receiver.

"What is it?" asked Broggan, reluctantly beginning to display interest.

"This copper plate came off the center of the stage, front, at the Majestic Theater," grinned Togley. "This coil of wire came out of Ruth Mauve's good-looking clothes. This receiver came off one of her shell-like ears, where it was hid under her fluffy chestnut hair and a silk blindfold. I managed to get hold of part of the outfit before they left."

Chief Broggan seemed on the verge of seeing a great light.

"Well, what t'ell did *you* have to do with it?" he demanded testily.

"Oh! I was the unseen spirit! I was the guy who read the messages out to her over her dinky little telephone, and told her who it was when some well-known fish wrote her a question. You see, they shot the little slips down a chute to me, under the stage, where I had a special peephole

to observe the mystified boobs in the audience. Everybody thought all the time the real questions was in the hat, all sealed up in envelopes, but they was using dummy slips to wave over Ruth's busy little dome.

"All Ruth had to do was to sit down in a certain place, and put her foot on this copper plate in the floor. There was another plate on the sole of her dainty shoe, and that made a connection. She could walk all over the house, if she wanted to, just so she came back to the little copper plate that rang my private number. Pretty nifty for telepathic stuff, hey?"

The chief bit the corners of his mustache and looked troubled.

"Look here!" he growled. "I want the truth: What did *you* know about the alderman from the Fourth Ward?"

Togley smiled delightedly.

"Say, chief, that was great! I swore I'd get next to that snake Bendleworth for canning me. Never mind how I got the tip from the police commission that he had preferred charges. But I knew if that old Fourth Ward ghost ever walked it would get Bendleworth's goat. I didn't know a thing, chief, but I worked with him on that little case, and I just suspected. Honest, is that why he quit?"

The chief nodded.

"Say, Togley," he proposed. "You want a good job on the force, don't you? A sort of—we'll say, chief of detectives? Well, it's yours. And you're gonna forget this—er—Ruth Mauve business, ain't you?"

Togley looked hurt.

"But chief—"

"Ain't you?"

"Sure chief. But I don't see why—"

"She done me a good turn," said Chief Broggan.

Be sure to follow

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September 27

Luck

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CHAPTER XXXII.

A TALE OF A CARELESS MAN.

TO the door ran Jacqueline and threw it open.

"Ride down the valley!" she cried. "That's right. He's coming up, and he'll meet you on the way. He'll be glad—to see you!"

She saw the rider swing sharply about, and the clatter of the galloping hoofs died out up the valley; then she closed the door, dropped the latch, and, running to the middle of the room, threw up her arms and cried out, a wild, shrill yell of triumph like the call of the old Indian brave when he rises with the scalp of his murdered enemy dripping in his hand.

The extended arms she caught back to her breast, and stood there with head tilted back, crushing her delight closer to her heart.

And she whispered: "Pierre! Mine, mine! Pierre!"

Next she went to the steel mirror on the wall and looked long at the flushed, triumphant image. At length she started, like one awakening from a happy dream, and hurriedly coiled the thick, soft tresses about her head. Never before had she lingered so over a toilet, patting each lock into place, twisting her head from side to side like a peacock admiring its image.

Now she looked about hungrily for a touch of color and uttered a little moan of vexation when she saw nothing, till her eyes, piercing through the gloom of a dim corner, she saw a spray of autumn leaves, long left there and still stained with beauty. She fastened them at the breast of her shirt, and so arrayed began to cook.

Never was there a merrier cook, not even some jolly French chef with a heart made warm with good red wine, for she sang as she worked, and whenever she had to cross the room it was with a dancing step. Spring was in her blood, warm spring that loosens the muscles about the heart and makes the eyes of girls dim and sets men smiling for no cause except that they are living, and rejoice with the whole awakening world.

So it was with Jacqueline. Ever and anon as she leaned over the pans and stirred the fire she raised her head and remained a moment motionless, waiting for a sound, yearning to hear, and each time she had to look down again with a sigh.

As it was, he took her by surprise, for he entered with the soft foot of the hunted and remained an instant searching the room with a careful glance. Not that he suspected, not that he had not relaxed his guard and his vigilance the moment he caught sight of the flicker of light through the mass of great boulders, but the lifelong habit of vigilance remained with him.

Even when he spoke face to face with a man, he never seemed to be giving more than half his attention, for might not some one else approach if he lost himself in order to listen to any one voice? He had covered half the length of the room with that soundless step before she heard, and rose with a glad cry: "Pierre!"

Meeting that calm blue eye, she checked herself mightily.

"A hard ride?" she asked.

"Nothing much."

He took the rock nearest the fire and then raised a glance of inquiry.

"I got cold," she said, "and rolled it over."

This story began in *The Argosy* for August 9.

He considered her and then the rock, not with a suspicion, but as if he held the matter in abeyance for further consideration; a hunted man and a hunter must keep an eye for little things, must carry an armed hand and an armed heart even among friends. As for Jacqueline, her color had risen, and she leaned hurriedly over a pan in which meat was frying.

"Any results?" she asked.

"Some."

She waited, knowing that the story would come at length.

He added after a moment: "Strange how careless some people get to be."

"Yes?" she queried.

"Yes."

Another pause, during which he casually drummed his fingers on his knee. She saw that he must receive more encouragement before he would tell, and she gave it, smiling to herself. Women are old in certain ways of understanding in which men remain children forever.

"I suppose we're still broke, Pierre?"

"Broke? Well, not entirely. I got some results."

"Good."

"As a matter of fact, it was a pretty fair haul. Watch that meat, Jack; I think it's burning."

It was hardly beginning to cook, but she turned it obediently and hid another slow smile. Rising, she passed behind his chair, and pretended to busy herself with something near the wall. This was the environment and attitude which would make him talk most freely, she knew.

"Speaking of careless men," said Pierre, "I could tell you a yarn, Jack."

She stood close behind him and made about his unconscious head a gesture of caress, the overflow of an infinite tenderness.

"I'd sure like to hear it, Pierre."

"Well, it was like this: I knew a fellow who started on the range with a small stock of cattle. He wasn't a very good worker, and he didn't understand cattle any too well, so he didn't prosper for quite a while. Then his affairs took a sudden turn for the better; his herd began to increase. Nobody understood the reason, though a good many

suspected, but one man fell onto the reason: our friend was simply running in a few doggies on the side, and he'd arranged a very ingenious way of changing the brands."

"Pierre—"

"Well?"

"What does 'ingenious' mean?"

"Why, I should say it means 'skilful, clever,' and it carries with it the connotation of 'novel.'"

"It carries the con-conno—what's that word, Pierre?"

"I'm going to get some books for you, Jack, and we'll do a bit of reading on the side, shall we?"

"I'd love that!"

He turned and looked up to her sharply.

He said: "Sometimes, Jack, you talk just like a girl."

"Do I? That's queer, isn't it? But go on with the story."

"He changed the brands very skilfully, and no one got the dope on him except this one man I mentioned; and that man kept his face shut. He waited.

"So it went on for a good many years. The herd of our friend grew very rapidly. He sold just enough cattle to keep himself and his wife alive; he was bent on making one big haul, you see. So when his doggies got to the right age and condition for the market, he'd trade them off, one fat doggie for two or three skinny yearlings. But finally he had a really big herd together, and shipped it off to the market on a year when the price was sky-high."

"Like this year?"

"Don't interrupt me, Jack!"

From the shadow behind him she smiled again.

"They went at a corking price, and our friend cleared up a good many thousand—I won't say just how much. He sank part of it in a ruby brooch for his wife, and shoved the rest into a satchel.

"You see how careful he'd been all those years while he was piling up his fortune? Well, he began to get careless the moment he cashed in, which was rather odd. He depended on his fighting power to keep that money safe, but he forgot that while he'd been making a business of rustling doggies and watching cattle markets, other men had

been making a business of shooting fast and straight.

"Among others there was the silent man who'd watched and waited for so long. But this silent man hove alongside while our rich friend was bound home in a buckboard.

" 'Good evening!' he called.

"The rich chap turned and heard; it all seemed all right, but he'd done a good deal of shady business in his day, and that made him suspicious of the silent man now. So he reached for his gun and got it out just in time to be shot cleanly through the hand.

"The silent man tied up that hand and sympathized with the rich chap; then he took that satchel and divided the paper money into two bundles. One was twice the size of the other, and the silent man took the smaller one. There was only twelve thousand dollars in it. Also, he took the ruby brooch for a friend—and as a sort of keepsake, you know. And he delivered a short lecture to the rich man on the subject of carelessness and rode away. The rich man picked up his gun with his left hand and opened fire, but he'd never learned to shoot very well with that hand, so the silent man came through safe."

"That's a bully story," said Jack. "Who was the silent man?"

"I think you've seen him a few times, at that."

She concealed another smile, and said in the most businesslike manner: "Chow-time, Pierre," and set out the pans on the table.

"By the way," he said easily, "I've got a little present for you, Jack."

And he took out a gold pin flaming with three great rubies.

house, and so when I saw that pin I—well—"

"Oh, Pierre!" said a stifled voice. "Oh, Pierre!"

"By Jove, Jack, aren't angry, are you? See, when you put it at the throat it doesn't look half bad!"

And to try it, he pinned it on her shirt. She caught both his hands, kissed them again and again, and then buried her face against them as she sobbed. If the heavens had opened and a cloudburst crashed on the roof of the house, he would have been less astounded.

"What is it?" he cried. "Damn it all—Jack—you see—I meant—"

But she tore herself away and flung herself face down on the bunk, sobbing more bitterly than ever. He followed, awestricken—terrified.

He touched her shoulder, but she shrank away and seemed more distressed than ever. It was not the crying of a weak woman: these were heartrending sounds, like the sobbing of a man who has never before known tears.

"Jack—perhaps I've done something wrong—"

He stammered again: "I didn't dream I was hurting you—"

Then light broke upon him.

He said: "It's because you don't want to be treated like a silly girl; eh, Jack?"

But to complete his astonishment she moaned: "N-n-no! It's b-b-because you—you n-n-n-never *do* t-treat me like a g-g-girl, P-P-Pierre!"

He groaned heartily: "Well, I'll be damned!"

And because he was thoughtful he strode away, staring at the floor. It was then that he saw it, small and crumpled on the floor. He picked it up—a glove of the softest leather. He carried it back to Jacqueline.

"What's this?"

"Wh-wh-what?"

"This glove I found on the floor?"

The sobs decreased at once—broke out more violently—and then she sprang up from the bunk, face suffused, and eyes timidly seeking his with upward glances.

"Pierre, I've acted a regular chump. Are you out with me?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A COUNT TO TEN.

SHE merely stared, like a child which may either burst into tears or laughter, no one can prophesy which.

He explained, rather worried: "You see, you *are* a girl, Jack, and I remembered that you were pleased about those clothes that you wore to the dance in Crittenden School-

"Not a bit, old-timer. But about this glove?"

"Oh, that's one of mine."

She took it and slipped it into the bosom of her shirt—the calm blue eye of Pierre noted.

He said: "We'll eat and forget the rest of this, if you want, Jack."

"And you ain't mad at me, Pierre?"

"Not a bit."

There was just a trace of coldness in his tone, and she knew perfectly why it was there, but she chose to ascribe it to another cause.

She explained: "You see, a woman is just about nine-tenths fool, Pierre, and has to bust out like that once in a while."

"Oh!" said Pierre, and his eyes wandered past her as though he found food for thought on the wall.

She ventured cautiously, after seeing that he was eating with appetite: "How does the pin look?"

"Why, fine."

And the silence began again.

She dared not question him in that mood, so she ventured again: "The old boy shooting left-handed—didn't he even fan the wind near you?"

"That was another bit of carelessness," said Pierre, but his smile held little of life. "He might have known that if he *had* shot close—by accident—I might have turned around and shot him dead—on purpose. But when a man stops thinking for a minute, he's apt to go on for a long time making a fool of himself."

"Right," she said, brightening as she felt the crisis pass away, "and that reminds me of a story about—"

"By the way, Jack, I'll wager there's a more interesting story than that you could tell me."

"What?"

"About how that glove happened to be on the floor."

"Why, partner, it's just a glove of my own."

"Didn't know you wore gloves with a leather as soft as that."

"No? Well, that story I was speaking about runs something like this—"

And she told him a gay narrative, throw-

ing all her spirit into it, for she was an admirable mimic. He met her spirit more than half-way, laughing gaily; and so they reached the end of the story and the end of the meal at the same time. She cleared away the pans with a few motions and tossed them clattering into a corner. Neat housekeeping was not numbered among the many virtues of Jacqueline.

"Now," said Pierre, leaning back against the wall, "we'll hear about that glove."

"Damn the glove!" broke from her.

"Steady, pal!"

"Pierre, are you going to nag me about a little thing like that?"

"Why, Jack, you're red and white in patches. I'm interested."

He sat up.

"I'm more than interested. The story, Jack."

"Well, I suppose I have to tell you. I did a fool thing to-day. Took a little gallop down the trail, and on my way back I met a girl sitting in her saddle with her face in her hands, crying her heart out. Poor kid! She'd come up in a hunting party and got separated from the rest.

"So I got sympathetic—"

"About the first time on record that you've been sympathetic with another girl, eh?"

"Shut up, Pierre! And I brought her in here—right into your cabin, without thinking what I was doing, and gave her a cup of coffee. Of course it was a pretty greenhorn trick, but I guess no harm will come of it. The girl thinks it's a prospector's cabin—which it was once. She went on her way, happy, because I told her of the right trail to get back with her gang. That's all there is to it. Are you mad at me for letting any one come into this place?"

"Mad?" he smiled. "No, I think that's one of the best lies you ever told me, Jack."

Their eyes met, hers very wide, and his keen and steady. Then she gripped at the butt of her gun, an habitual trick when she was very angry, and cried: "Do I have to sit here and let you call me—that? Pierre, pull a few more tricks like that and I'll call for a new deal. Get me?"

She rose, whirled, and threw herself sullenly on her bunk.

"Come back," said Pierre. "You're more scared than angry. Why are you afraid, Jack?"

"It's a lie—I'm not afraid!"

"Let me see that glove again."

"You've seen it once—that's enough."

He whistled carelessly, rolling a cigarette. After he lighted it he said: "Ready to talk yet, partner?"

She maintained an obstinate silence, but that sharp eye saw that she was trembling. He set his teeth and then drew several long puffs on the cigarette.

"I'm going to count to ten, pal, and when I finish you're going to tell me everything straight. In the mean time don't stay there thinking up a new lie. I know you too well, and if you try the same thing on me again—"

"Well?" she snarled, all the tiger coming back in her voice.

"You'll talk, all right. Here goes the count: One—two—three—four—"

As he counted, leaving a long drag of two or three seconds between numbers, there was not a change in the figure of the girl. She still lay with her back turned on him, and the only expressive part that showed was her hand. First it lay limp against her hip, but as the monotonous count proceeded it gathered to a fist.

"Five—six—seven—"

It seemed that he had been counting for hours, his will against her will, the man in him against the woman in her, and during the pauses between the sound of his voice the very air grew charged with waiting. To the girl the wait for every count was like the wait of the doomed traitor when he stands facing the firing-squad, watching the glimmer of light go down the aimed rifles.

For she knew the face of the man who sat there counting; she knew how the fire-light flared in the dark-red of his hair and made it seem like another fire beneath which the blue of the eyes was strangely cold and keen. Her hand had gathered to a hard-balled fist.

"Eight—nine—"

She sprang up, screaming: "No, no, Pierre!"

And threw out her arms to him.

"Ten."

She whispered: "It was the girl with yellow hair—Mary Brown."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TIGER-HEART.

IT was as if she had said: "Good morning!" in the calmest of voices. There was no answer in him, neither word nor expression, and out of ten sharp-eyed men, nine would have passed him by without noting the difference; but the girl knew him as the monk knows his prayers or the Arab his horse, and a solemn, deep despair came over her. She felt like the drowning, when the water closes over their heads for the last time.

He puffed twice again at the cigarette and then flicked the butt into the fire. When he spoke it was only to say: "Did she stay long?"

But his eyes avoided her. She moved a little so as to read his face, but when he turned again and answered her stare she winced.

"Not very long, Pierre."

"Ah," he said, "I see! It was because she didn't dream that this was the place I lived in."

It was the sort of heartless, torturing questioning which was once the cruellest weapon of the inquisition. With all her heart she fought to raise her voice above the whisper whose very sound accused her, but she could not. She was condemned to that voice as the man bound in nightmare is condemned to walk slowly, slowly, though the terrible danger is racing toward him, and the safety which he must reach lies only a dozen steps, a dozen mortal steps away.

She said in that voice: "No; of course she didn't dream it."

"And you, Jack, had her interests at heart—her best interests, poor girl, and didn't tell her?"

Her hands went out to him in mute appeal.

"Please, Pierre—don't!"

"Is something troubling you, Jack?"

"You are breaking my heart."

"Why, by no means! Let's sit here

calmly and chat about the girl with the yellow hair. To begin with—she's rather pleasant to look at, don't you think?"

"I suppose she is."

"H-m! rather poor taste not to be sure of it. Well, let it go. You've always had rather queer taste in women, Jack; but, of course, being a long-rider, you haven't seen much of them. At least her name is delightful—Mary Brown! You've no idea how often I've repeated it aloud to myself and relished the sound—Mary Brown!"

"I hate her!"

"You two didn't have a very agreeable time of it? By the way, she must have left in rather a hurry to forget her glove, eh?"

"Yes, she ran—like a coward."

"Ah?"

"Like a trembling coward. How can you care for a white-faced little fool like that? Is she your match? Is she your mate?"

He considered a moment, as though to make sure that he did not exaggerate.

"I love her, Jack, as men love water when they've ridden all day over hot sand without a drop on their lips—you know when the tongue gets thick and the mouth fills with cotton—and then you see clear, bright water, and taste it?"

"She is like that to me. She feeds every sense; and when I look in her eyes, Jack, I feel like the starved man on the desert, as I was saying, drinking that priceless water. You knew something of the way I feel, Jack. Isn't it a little odd that you didn't keep her here?"

She had stood literally shuddering during this speech, and now she burst out, far beyond all control: "Because she loathes you; because she hates herself for ever having loved you; because she despises herself for having ridden up here after you. Does that fill your cup of water, Pierre, eh?"

His forehead was shining with sweat, but he set his teeth, and, after a moment, he was able to say in the same hard, calm voice: "I suppose there was no real reason for her change. She can be persuaded back to me in a moment. In that case just tell me where she has gone and I'll ride after her."

He made as if to ride, but she cried in a

panic, and yet with a wild exultation: "No, she's done with you forever, and the more you make love to her now the more she'll hate you. Because she knows that when you kissed her before—when you kissed her—you were living with a woman."

"I—living with a woman?"

Her voice had risen out of the whisper for the outbreak. Now it sank back into it.

"Yes—with me!"

"With you? I see. Naturally it must have gone hard with her—Mary! And she wouldn't see reason even when you explained that you and I are like brothers?"

He leaned a little toward her and just a shade of emotion came in his voice.

"When you carefully explained, Jack, with all the eloquence you could command, that you and I have ridden and fought and camped together like brothers for six years? And how I gave you your first gun? And how I've stayed between you and danger a thousand times? And how I've never treated you otherwise than as a man? And how I've given you the love of a blood-brother to take the place of the brother who died? And how I've kept you in a clean and pure respect such as a man can only give once in his life—and then only to his dearest friend? She wouldn't listen—even when you talked to her like this?"

"For God's sake—Pierre!"

"Ah, but you talked well enough to pave the way for me. You talked so eloquently that with a little more persuasion from me she will know and understand. Come, I must be gone after her. Which way did she ride—up or down the valley?"

"You could talk to her forever and she'd never listen. Pierre, I told her that I was—your woman—that you'd told me of your scenes with her—and that we'd laughed at them together."

She covered her eyes and crouched, waiting for the wrath that would fall on her, but he only smiled bitterly on the bowed head, saying: "Why have I waited so long to hear you say what I knew already? I suppose because I wouldn't believe until I heard the whole abominable truth from your own lips. Jack, why did you do it?"

"Won't you see? Because I've loved you always, Pierre!"

"Love—you—your tiger-heart? No, but you were like a cruel, selfish child. You were jealous because you didn't want the toy taken away. I knew it. I knew that even if I rode after her it would be hopeless. Oh, God, how terribly you've hurt me, partner!"

It wrung a little moan from her. He said after a moment: "It's only the ghost of a chance, but I'll have to take it. Tell me which may she rode? No? Then I'll try to find her."

She leaped between him and the door, flinging her shoulders against it with a crash and standing with outspread arms to bar the way.

"You must not go!"

He turned his head somewhat.

"Don't stand in front of me, Jack. You know I'll do what I say, and just now it's a bit hard for me to face you, old fellow."

"Pierre, I feel as if there were a hand squeezing my heart small, and small, and small. Pierre, I'd die for you!"

"I know you would. I know you would, partner. It was only a mistake, and you acted the way any cold-hearted boy would act if—if some one were to try to steal his horse, for instance. But just now it's hard for me to look at you and be calm."

"Don't try to be! Swear at me—curse—rave—beat me; I'd be glad of the blows, Pierre; I'd hold out my arms to 'em. But don't go out that door!"

"Why?"

"Because—if you found her—she's not alone."

"Say that slowly. I don't understand. She's not alone?"

"I'll try to tell you from the first. She started out for you with Dick Wilbur for a guide."

"Good old Dick, God bless him! I'll fill all his pockets with gold for that; and he loves her, you know."

"You'll never see Dick Wilbur again. On the first night they camped she missed him when he went for water. She went down after a while and saw the mark of his body on the sand. He never appeared again."

"Who was it?"

"Listen. The next morning she woke up

and found that some one had taken care of the fire while she slept, and her pack was lashed on one of the saddles. She rode on that day and came at night to a camp-fire with a bed of boughs near it and no one in sight. She took that camp for herself and no one showed up.

"Don't you see? Some one was following her up the valley and taking care of the poor baby on the way. Some one who was afraid to let himself be seen. Perhaps it was the man who killed Dick Wilbur without a sound there beside the river; perhaps as Dick died he told the man who killed him about the lonely girl and this other man was white enough to help Mary.

"But all Mary ever saw of him was that second night when she thought that she saw a streak of white, traveling like a galloping horse, that disappeared over a hill and into the trees—"

"A streak of white—"

"Yes, yes! The white horse—McGurk!"

"McGurk!" repeated Pierre stupidly; then: "And you knew she would be going out to him when she left this house?"

"I knew—Pierre—don't look at me like that—I knew that it would be murder to let you cross with McGurk. You're the last of seven—he's a devil—no man—"

"And you let her go out into the night—to him."

She clung to a last thread of hope: "If you met him and killed him with the luck of the cross it would bring equal bad luck on some one you love—on the girl, Pierre!"

He was merely repeating stupidly: "You let her go out—to him—in the night! She's in his arms now—you devil—you tiger—"

She threw herself down and clung about his knees with hysterical strength.

"Pierre, you shall not go. Pierre, you walk on my heart if you go!"

He tore the little cross from his neck and flung it into her upturned face.

"Don't make me put my hands on you, Jack. Let me go!"

There was no need to tear her grasp away. She crumpled and slipped sidewise to the floor. He leaned over and shook her violently by the shoulder.

"Which way did she ride? Which way did they ride?"

She whispered: "Down the valley, Pierre; down the valley; I swear they rode that way."

And as she lay in a half swoon she heard the faint clatter of galloping hoofs over the rocks and a wild voice yelling, fainter and fainter with distance: "McGurk!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

JACK HEARS A SMALL VOICE.

IT came back to her like a threat; it beat at her ears and roused her, that continually diminishing cry: "McGurk!" It went down the valley, and Mary Brown, and McGurk with her, perhaps, had gone up the gorge, but it would be a matter of a short time before Pierre le Rouge discovered that there was no camp-fire to be sighted in the lower valley and whirled to storm back up the cañon with that battle-cry: "McGurk!" still on his lips.

And if the two met she knew the result. Seven strong men had ridden together, fought together, and one by one they had fallen, disappeared like the white smoke of the camp-fire, jerked off into thin air by the wind, until only one remained.

How clearly she could see them all! Bud Mansie, meager, lean, with a shifting eye; Garry Patterson, of the red, good-natured face; Phil Branch, stolid and short and muscled like a giant; Handsome Dick Wilbur on his racing bay; Black Gandil, with his villainies from the South Seas like an invisible mantle of awe about him; and her father, the stalwart, gray Boone.

All these had gone, and there remained only Pierre le Rouge to follow in the steps of the six who had gone before.

She crawled to the door, feeble in mind and shuddering of body like a runner who has spent his last energy in a long race, and drew it open. The wind blew up the valley from the Old Crow, but no sound came back to her, no calling from Pierre; and over her rose the black pyramid of the western peak of the Twin Bears like a monstrous nose pointing stiffly toward the stars.

She closed the door, dragged herself back to her feet, and stood with her shoulders leaning against the wall. Her weakness was

not weariness—it was as if something had been taken from her. She wondered at herself somewhat vaguely. Surely she had never been like this before, with the singular coldness about her heart and the feeling of loss, of infinite loss.

What had she lost? She began to search her mind for an answer. Then she smiled uncertainly, a wan, small smile. It was very clear; what she had lost was all interest in life and all hope for the brave tomorrow. Nothing remained of all those lovely dreams which she had built up by day and night about the figure of Pierre le Rouge. He was gone, and the bright-colored bubble she had blown vanished at once.

She felt a slight pain at her forehead and then remembered the cross which Pierre had thrown into her face. Casting that away he had thrown his faintest chance of victory with it; it would be a slaughter, not a battle, and red-handed McGurk would leave one more foe behind him.

But looking down she found the cross and picked up the shining bit of metal; it seemed as if she held the greater part of Pierre le Rouge in her hands. She raised the cross to her lips.

When she fastened the cross about her throat it was with no exultation, but like one who places over his heart a last memorial of the dead; a consecration, like the red sign or the white which the crusaders wore on the covers of their shields.

Then she took from her breast the spray of autumn leaves. He had not noticed them, yet perhaps they had helped to make him gay when he came into the cabin that night, so she placed the spray on the table. Next she unpinning the great rubies from her throat and let her eye linger over them for a moment. They were chosen stones, each as deeply lighted as an eye, if there ever were eyes of this blood-red, and they looked up at her with a lure and a challenge at once.

The first thought of what she must do came to Jacqueline then, but not in an overwhelming tide—it was rather a small voice that whispered in her heart.

Last, she took from her bosom the glove of the yellow-haired girl. Compared with her stanch riding gloves, how small was

this! Yet, when she tried it, it slipped easily on her hand. This she laid in that little pile, for these were the things which Pierre would wish to find if by some miracle he came back from the battle. The spray, perhaps, he would not understand; and yet he might. She pressed both hands to her breast and drew a long breath, for her heart was breaking. Through her misted eyes she could barely see the shimmer of the cross.

That sight made her look up, searching for a superhuman aid in her wo, and for the first time in her life a conception of God dawned on her wild, gay mind. She made a picture of him like a vast cloud looming over the Twin Bear peaks and breathing an infinite calm over the mountains. The cloud took a faintly human shape—a shape somewhat like that of her father when he lived, for he could be both stern and gentle, as she well knew, and such gray Boone had been.

Perhaps it was because of this that another picture came out of her infancy of a soft voice, of a tender-touching hand, of brooding, infinitely loving eyes. She smiled the wan smile again because for the first time it came to her that she, too, even she, the wild, the "tiger-heart," as Pierre himself had called her, might one day have been the mother of a child, his child.

But the ache within her grew so keen that she dropped, writhing, to her knees, and twisted her hands together in an agony. It was prayer. There were no words to it, but it was prayer, a wild appeal for aid.

That aid came in the form of a calm that swept on her like the flood of a clear moonlight over a storm-beaten landscape. The whisper which had come in her before was now a solemn-speaking voice, and she knew what she must do. She could not keep the two men apart, but she might reach McGurk before and strike him down by stealth, by craft, any way to kill that man as terrible as a devil, as invulnerable as a ghost.

This she might do in the heart of the night, and afterward she might have the courage left to tell the girl the truth and then creep off somewhere and let this steady pain burn its way out of her heart.

Once she had reached a decision, it was characteristic that she moved swiftly. Also,

there was cause for haste, for by this time Pierre must have discovered that there was no one in the lower reaches of the gorge and would be galloping back with all the speed of the cream-colored mare which even McGurk's white horse could not match.

She ran from the cabin and into the little lean-to behind it where the horses were tethered. There she swung her saddle with expert hands, whipped up the cinch, and pulled it with the strength of a man, mounted, and was off up the gorge.

For the first few minutes she let the long-limbed black race on at full speed, a breathless course, because the beat of the wind in her face raised her courage, gave her a certain impulse which was almost happiness, just as the martyrs rejoiced and held out their hands to the fire that was to consume them; but after the first burst of headlong galloping, she drew down the speed to a hand-canter, and this in turn to a fast trot, for she dared not risk the far-echoed sound of the clattering hoofs over the rock.

And as she rode she saw at last the winking eye of red which she longed for and dreaded. She pulled her black to an instant halt and swung from the saddle, tossing the reins over the head of the horse to keep him standing there.

Yet, after she had made half a dozen hurried paces something forced her to turn and look again at the handsome head of the horse. He stood quite motionless, with his ears pricking after her, and now as she stopped he whinnied softly, hardly louder than the whisper of a man. So she ran back again and threw the reins over the horn of the saddle; he should be free to wander where he chose through the free mountains, but as for her, she knew very certainly now that she would never mount that saddle again, or control that triumphant steed with the touch of her hands on the reins. She put her arms around his neck and drew his head down close.

There was a dignity in that parting, for it was the burning of her bridges behind her. When "King-Maker" Richard of Warwick, betrayed and beaten on the field, came to his last stand by the forest, he dismounted and stabbed his favorite charg-

er. Very different was this wild mountain girl from the armored earl who put kings up and pulled them down again at pleasure, but her heart swelled as great as the heart of famous Warwick; he gave up a kingdom, and she gave up her love.

When she drew back the horse followed her a pace, but she raised a silent hand in the night and halted him; a moment later she was lost among the boulders.

It was rather slow work to stalk that camp-fire, for the big boulders cut off the sight of the red eye time and again, and she had to make little, cautious détours before she found it again, but she kept steadily at her work. Once she stopped, her blood running cold, for she thought that she heard a faint voice blown up the cañon on the wind: "McGurk!"

For half a minute she stood frozen, listening, but the sound was not repeated, and she went on again with greater haste. So she came at last in view of a hollow in the side of the gorge. Here there were a few trees, growing in the cove, and here, she knew, there was a small spring of clear water. Many a time she had made a cup of her hands and drunk here.

Now she made out the fire clearly, the trees throwing out great spokes of shadow on all sides, spokes of shadows that wavered and shook with the flare of the small fire beyond them. She dropped to her hands and knees and, parting the dense underbrush, began the last stealthy approach.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

UP the same course which Jacqueline followed, Mary Brown had fled earlier that night with the triumphant laughter of Jack still ringing in her ears and following her like a remorseless, pointed hand of shame.

There is no power like shame to disarm the spirit. A dog will fight if a man laughs at him; a coward will challenge the devil himself if he is whipped on by scorn; and this proud girl shrank and moaned on the saddle. She had not progressed far enough to hate Pierre. That would come later,

but now all her heart had room for was a consuming loathing of herself.

Some of that torture went into the spurs with which she punished the side of the bay, and the tall horse responded with a high-tossed head and a burst of whirlwind speed. The result was finally a stumble over a loose rock that almost flung Mary over the pommel of the saddle and forced her to draw rein.

Having slowed the pace she became aware that she was very tired from the trip of the day, and utterly exhausted by the wild scene with Jacqueline, so that she began to look about for a place where she could stop for even an hour or so and rest her aching body.

It was at this time that she heard the purl and whisper of running water, a sound dear to the hearts of all travelers. She veered to the left and found the little grove of trees with a thick shrubbery growing between, fed by the water of that diminutive brook. She dismounted and tethered the horses.

By this time she had seen enough of camping out to know how to make herself fairly comfortable, and she set about it methodically, eagerly. It was something to occupy her mind and keep out a little of that burning sense of shame. One picture it could not obliterate, and that was the scene of Jacqueline and Pierre le Rouge laughing together over the love affair with the silly girl of the yellow hair.

That was the meaning, then, of those silences that had come between them? He had been thinking, remembering, careful lest he should forget a single scruple of the whole ludicrous affair. She shuddered, remembering how she had fairly flung herself into his arms.

On that she brooded, after starting the little fire. It was not that she was cold, but the fire, at least, in the heart of the black night, was a friend incapable of human treachery. She had not been there long when the tall bay, Wilbur's horse, stiffened, raised his head, arched his tail, and then whinnied.

She started to her feet, stirred by a thousand fears, and heard, far away, an answering neigh. At once all thought of shame

and of Pierre le Rouge vanished from her mind, for she remembered the invisible guardian who had followed her up the valley of the Old Crow. Perhaps he was coming now out of the night; perhaps she would even see him.

And the excitement grew in her pulse by pulse, as the excitement grows in a man waiting for a friend at a station; he sees first the faint smoke like a cloud on the skyline, and then a black speck beneath the smoke, and next the engine draws up on him with a humming of the rails which grows at length to a thunder.

All the while his heart beats faster and faster and rocks with the sway of the approaching engine; so the heart of Mary Brown beat, though she could not see, but only felt the coming of the stranger.

The only sign she saw was in the horses, which showed an increasing uneasiness. Her own mare now shared the restlessness of the tall bay, and the two were footing it nervously here and there, tugging at the tethers, and tossing up their heads, with many a start, as if they feared and sought to flee from some approaching catastrophe—some vast and preternatural change—some forest fire which came galloping faster than even their fleet limbs could carry them.

Yet all beyond the pale of her camp-fire's light was silence, utter and complete silence. It seemed as if a veritable muscular energy went into the intensity of her listening, but not a sound reached her except a faint whispering of the wind in the dark trees above her.

But at last she knew that the thing was upon her. The horses ceased their prancing and stared in a fixed direction through the thicket of shrubbery; the very wind grew hushed above her; she could feel the new presence as one feels the silence when a door closes and shuts away the sound of the street below.

It came on her with a shock, thrilling, terrible, yet not altogether unpleasant. She rose, her hands clenched at her sides and the great blue eyes abnormally wide as they stared in the same direction as the eyes of the two horses held. Yet for all her preparation she nearly fainted and a blackness came across her mind when a voice sounded

directly behind her, a pleasantly modulated voice: "Look this way. I am here, in front of the fire."

She turned about and the two horses, quivering, whirled toward that sound.

She stepped back, back until the embers of the fire lay between her and that side of the little clearing.

The voice spoke again: "Do not be afraid. You are safe, absolutely."

"What are you?"

"Your friend."

"Is it you who followed me up the valley?"

"Yes."

"Come into the light. I must see you." A faint laughter reached her from the dark.

"I cannot let you do that. If that had been possible I should have come to you before."

"But I feel—I feel almost as if you are a ghost and no man of flesh and blood."

"It is better for you to feel that way about it," said the voice solemnly, "than to know me."

"At least, tell me why you have followed me, why you have cared for me."

"You will hate me if I tell you, and fear me."

"No, whatever you are, trust me. Tell me at least what came to Dick Wilbur?"

"That's easy enough. I met him at the river, a little by surprise, and caught him before he could even shout. Then I took his guns and let him go."

"But he didn't come back to me?"

"No. He knew that I would be there. I might have finished him without giving him a chance to speak, girl, but I'd seen him with you and I was curious. So I found out where you were going and why, and let Wilbur go. I came back and looked at you and found you asleep."

She grew cold at the thought of him leaning over her.

"I watched you a long time, and I suppose I'll remember you always as I saw you then. You were very beautiful with the shadow of the lashes against your cheek—almost as beautiful as you are now as you stand over there, fearing and loathing me. I dared not let you see me, but I decided to take care of you—for a while."

"And now?"

"I have come to say farewell to you."

"Let me see you once before you go. It's a little thing."

"The greatest thing in the world. You see, I fear you even more than you fear me."

"Then I'll follow you through the darkness to see you."

"It would be useless—utterly useless. There are ways of becoming invisible in the mountains. But before I go, tell me one thing: Have you left the cabin to search for Pierre le Rouge in another place?"

"No. I do not search for him."

There was an instant of pause. Then the voice said sharply: "Did Wilbur lie to me?"

"No, I started up the valley to find him."

"But you've given him up?"

"I hate him—I hate him as much as I loathe myself for ever condescending to follow him."

She heard a quick breath drawn in the dark, and then a murmur: "I am free, then, to hunt him down!"

"You?"

"Listen: I had given him up for your sake; I gave him up when I stood beside you that first night and watched you trembling with the cold in your sleep. It was a weak thing for me to do, but since I saw you, Mary, I am not as strong as I once was."

"Now you go back on his trail? It is death for Pierre?"

"You say you hate him?"

"Ah, but as deeply as that?" she questioned herself.

"It may not be death for Pierre. I have ridden the ranges many years and met them all in time, but never one like him. Listen: six years ago I met him first and there he wounded me—the first time any man has touched me. And afterward I was afraid, Mary, for the first time in my life, for the charm of my success was broken. For six years I could not return, but now I am at his heels. Six are gone; he will be the last to go."

"What are you?" she cried. "Some bloodhound reincarnated?"

He said: "That is the mildest name I have ever been called."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MAN'S DEATH.

"GIVE up the trail of Pierre."

And there, brought face to face with the mortal question, even her fear burned low in her, and once more she remembered the youth who would not leave her in the snow, but held her in his arms with the strange cross above them.

She said simply: "I still love him."

A faint glimmer came to her through the dark and she could see deeper into the shrubbery, for now the moon stood up on the top of the great peak above them and flung a faint radiance into the hollow. That glimmer she saw, but no face of a man.

And the silence held; every second of it was more than a hundred spoken words.

Then the calm voice said: "I cannot give him up."

"For the sake of God!"

"God and I have been strangers for a good many years."

"For my sake!"

"But you see, I have been lying to myself. I told myself that I was coming merely to see you once—for the last time. But after I saw you I had to speak, and now that I have spoken it is hard to leave you, and now that I am with you I cannot give you up to Pierre le Rouge."

She cried: "What will you have of me?"

He answered with a ring of melancholy: "Friendship? No, I can't take those white hands—mine are too red. All I can do is to lurk about you like a shadow—a shadow with a sting that strikes down all other men who come near you."

She said: "For all men have told me about you, I know you could not do that."

"Mary, I tell you there are things about me, and possibilities, about which I don't dare to question myself."

"You have guarded me like a brother. Be one to me still; I have never needed one so deeply!"

"A brother? Mary, if your eyes were less blue or your hair less golden I might

be; but you are too beautiful to be only that to me."

"Listen to me—"

But she stopped in the midst of her speech, because a white head loomed beside the dim form. It was the head of a horse, with pricking ears, which now nosed the shoulder of its master, and she saw the firelight glimmering in the great eyes.

"Your horse," she said in a trembling voice, "loves you and trusts you."

"It is the only thing which has not feared me. When it was a colt it came out of the herd and nosed my hand. It is the only thing which has not fought me, as all men have done—as you are doing now, Mary."

The wind that blew up the gorge came in gusts, not any steady current, but fitful rushes of air, and on one of these brief blasts it seemed to Mary that she caught the sound of a voice blown to whistling murmur. It was a vague thing of which she could not be sure, as faint as a thought. Yet the head of the white horse disappeared, and the glimmer of the man's face went out.

She called: "Whatever you are, wait! Let me speak!"

But no answer came, and she knew that the form was gone forever.

She cried again: "Who's there?"

"It is I," said a voice at her elbow, and she turned to look into the dark eyes of Jacqueline.

"So he's gone?" asked Jack bitterly.

She lifted the butt of her gun.

"I thought—well, my chance at him is gone."

"But what is he?"

"The same man who followed you up the valley, fool!"

"But what—"

"Bah, if you knew you'd die of fear. Listen to what I have to say. All the things I told you in the cabin were lies."

"Lies?" said Mary evenly. "No, they proved themselves."

"Be still till I've finished, because if you talk you may make me forget—well, your throat's temptingly soft and small, and my hands—"

The gesture which finished the sentence was so eloquent of hate that Mary shrank

away and put the embers of the fire between them. She remembered the strength of those hands; they had lifted the rock which she could not budge.

"I tell you, it was all a lie, and Pierre le Rouge has never loved anything but you, you milk-faced, yellow-livered—"

She stopped again, fighting against her passion. The pride of Mary held her stiff and straight, though her voice shook.

"Has he sent you after me with mockery?"

"No, he's given up the hope of you."

"The hope?"

"Don't you see? Are you going to make me crawl to explain? It always seemed to me that God meant Pierre for me. It always seemed to me that a girl like me was what he needed. But Pierre had never seen it. Maybe, if my hair was yellow an' my eyes blue, he might have felt different; but the way it is, he's always treated me like a kid brother—"

"And lived with you?" said the other sternly.

"Like two men, fool! D'you understand how a woman could be the bunk of a man an' yet be no more to him than—than a man would be. You don't? Neither do I, but that's what I've been to Pierre le Rouge. What's that?"

She lifted her head and stood poised as if for flight. Once more the vague sound blew up to them upon the wind. Mary ran to her and grasped both of her hands in her own.

"If it's true—"

But Jack snatched her hands away and looked on the other with a mighty hatred and a mightier contempt.

"True? Why, it damn near finishes Pierre with me to think he'd take up with—a thing like you. But it's true. If somebody else had told me I'd of laughed at 'em. But it's true. Tell me: what 'll you do with him?"

"Take him back—if I can reach to him—take him back to the East and to God's country."

"Yes—maybe he'd be happy there. But when the spring comes to the city, Mary, wait till the wind blows in the night and the rain comes tappin' on the roof. Then

hold him if you can. D'ye hear? Hold him if you can!"

"If he cares it will not be hard. Tell me again, if—"

"Shut up. What's that again?"

The sound was closer now and unmistakably something other than the moan of the wind.

Jacqueline turned in great excitement to Mary:

"When did Mc—when did the man that was talkin' to you in the dark disappear? Had he heard that sound down the gorge?"

"Yes. I think so. And then he—"

"My God!"

"What is it?"

"Pierre, and he's calling for—d'you hear?"

Clear and loud, though from a great distance, the wind carried up the sound and the echo preserved it: "McGurk!"

"McGurk!" repeated Mary. "Was it he who—"

"Yes, fool! And you brought him up here with you, and brought his death to Pierre. What 'll you do to save him now? Pierre!"

She turned and fled out among the trees, and after her ran Mary, calling, like the other: "Pierre!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WAITING.

AFTER that call first reached him, clear to his ears though vague as a murmur at the ear of Mary, McGurk swung to the saddle of his white horse, and galloped down the gorge like a veritable angel of death.

The end was very near, he felt, yet the chances were at least ten to one that he would miss Pierre in the throat of the gorge, for among the great boulders, tall as houses, which littered it, a thousand men might have passed and repassed and never seen each other. Only the calling of Pierre could guide him surely.

The calling had ceased for some moments, and he began to fear that he had overrun his mark and missed Pierre in the heart of the pass, when, as he rounded a mighty

boulder, the shout ran ringing in his very ears: "McGurk!" and a horseman swung into view.

"Here!" he called in answer, and stood with his right hand lifted, bringing his horse to a sharp halt, like some ancient cavalier stopping in the middle of the battle to exchange greetings with a friendly foe.

The other rider whirled alongside, his sombrero's brim flaring back from his forehead, so that McGurk caught the glare of the eyes beneath the shadow.

"So for the third time, my friend—" said McGurk.

"Which is the fatal one," answered Pierre. "How will you die, McGurk? On foot or on horseback?"

"On the ground, Pierre, for my horse might stir and make my work messy. I love a neat job, you know."

"Good."

They swung from the saddles and stood facing each other.

"Begin!" commanded McGurk. "I've no time to waste."

"I've very little time to look at the living McGurk. Let me look my fill before the end."

"Then look, and be done. I've a lady coming to meet me."

The other grew marvelously calm.

"She is with you, McGurk?"

"My dear Pierre, I've been with her ever since she started up the Old Crow."

"It will be easier to forget her. Are you ready?"

"So soon? Come, man, there's much for us to say. Many old times to chat over."

"I only wonder," said Pierre, "how one death can pay back what you've done. Think of it! I've actually run away from you and hidden myself away among the hills. I've feared you, McGurk!"

He said it with a deep astonishment, as a grown man will speak of the way he feared darkness when he was a child. McGurk moistened his white lips. The white horse pawed the rocks as though impatient to be gone.

"Listen," said Pierre, "your horse grows restive. Suppose we stand here—it's a

convenient distance apart, you see, and wait with our arms folded for the next time the white horse paws the rocks, because when I kill you, McGurk, I want you to die knowing that another man was faster on the draw and straighter with his bullets than you are. D'you see?"

He could not have spoken with a more formal politeness if he had been asking the other to pass first through the door of a dining-room. The wonder of McGurk grew and the sweat on his forehead seemed to be spreading a chill through his entire body.

He said: "I see. You trust all to the cross, eh, Pierre? The little cross around your neck?"

"The cross is gone," said Pierre le Rouge. "Why should I use it against a night-rider, McGurk? Are you ready?"

And McGurk, not trusting his voice for some strange reason, nodded. The two folded their arms.

But the white horse which had been pawing the stones so eagerly a moment before was now unusually quiet. The very postures of the men seemed to have frozen him to stone, a beautiful, marble statue, with the moonlight glistening on the muscles of his perfect shoulders.

At length he stirred. At once a quiver jerked through the tense bodies of the waiting men, but the white horse had merely stiffened and raised his head high. Now, with arched neck and flaunting tail he neighed loudly, as if he asked a question. How could he know, dumb brute, that what he asked only death could answer?

And as they waited an itching came at the palm of McGurk's hand. It was not much, just a tingle of the blood. To ease it, he closed his fingers and found that his hand was moist with cold perspiration.

He began to wonder if his fingers would be slippery on the butt of the gun. Then he tried covertly to dry them against his shirt. But he ceased this again, knowing that he must be of hair-trigger alertness to watch for the stamp of the white horse.

It occurred to him, also, that he was standing on a loose stone which might wobble when he pulled his gun, and he cursed himself silently for his hasty folly. Pierre,

doubtless, had noticed that stone, and therefore he had made the suggestion that they stand where they were. Otherwise, how could there be that singular calm in the steady eyes which looked across at him?

Also, how explain the hunger of that stare? Was not he McGurk, and was not this a man whom he had already once shot down? God, what a fool he had been not to linger an instant longer in that saloon in the old days and place the final shot in the prostrate body! In all his life he had made only one such mistake, and now that folly was pursuing him. And now—

The foot of the white horse lifted—struck the rock. The sound of its fall was lost in the explosion of two guns, and a ring of metal on metal. The revolver snapped from the hand of McGurk, whirled in a flashing circle, and clanged on the rocks at his feet. The bullet of Pierre had struck the barrel and knocked it cleanly from his hand.

It was luck, only luck, that placed that shot, and his own bullet, which had started first, had traveled wild; for there stood Pierre le Rouge, smiling faintly, alert, calm. For the first time in his life McGurk had missed. He set his teeth and waited for death.

But that steady voice of Pierre said: "To shoot you would be a pleasure; it would even be a luxury, but there wouldn't be any lasting satisfaction in it. So there lies your gun at your feet. Well, here lies mine."

He dropped his own weapon to a position corresponding with that of McGurk's.

"We were both very wild that time. We must do better now. We'll stoop for our guns, McGurk. The signal? No, we won't wait for the horse to stamp. The signal will be when you stoop for your gun. You shall have every advantage, you see? Start for that gun, McGurk, when you're ready for the end."

The hand of McGurk stretched out and his arm stiffened, but it seemed as though all the muscles of his back had grown stiff. He could not bend. It was strange. It was both ludicrous and incomprehensible. Perhaps he had grown stiff with cold in that position.

But he heard the voice of Pierre explaining gently: "You can't move, my friend. I understand. It's fear that's stiffened your back. It's fear that sends the chill up and down your blood. It's fear that makes you think back to your murders, one by one. McGurk, you're done for. You're through. You're ready for the discard. I'm not going to kill you. I've thought of a finer hell than death, and that is to live as you shall live. I've beaten you, McGurk, beaten you fairly on the draw, and I've broken your heart by doing it. The next time you face a man you'll begin to think—you'll begin to remember how one other man beat you at the draw. And that wonder, McGurk, will make your hand freeze to your side, as you've made the hands of other men before me freeze. D'you understand?"

The lips of McGurk parted. The whisper of his dry panting reached Pierre, and the devil in him smiled.

"In six weeks, McGurk, you'll take water from a Chinaman. Now get out!"

And pace by pace McGurk drew back, with his face still toward Pierre.

The latter cried: "Wait. Are you going to leave your gun?"

Only the steady retreat continued.

"And go unarmed through the mountains? What will men say when they see McGurk with an empty holster?"

But the outlaw had passed out of view beyond the corner of one of the monster boulders. After him went the white horse, slowly, picking his steps, as if he were treading on dangerous and unknown ground and would not trust his leader. Pierre was left to the loneliness of the gorge.

The moonlight only served to make more visible its rocky nakedness, and like that nakedness was the life of Pierre under his hopeless inward eye. Over him loomed from either side the gleaming pinnacles of the Twin Bears, and he remembered many a time when he had looked up toward them from the crests of lesser mountains—looked up toward them as a man looks to a great and unattainable ideal.

Here he was come to the crest of all the ranges; here he was come to the height and limit of his life, and what had he attained? Only a cruel, cold isolation. It had been a

steep ascent; the declivity of the farther side led him down to a steep and certain ruin and the dark night below. But he stiffened suddenly and threw his head high as if he faced his fate; and behind him the cream-colored mare raised her head with a toss and whinnied softly.

It seemed to him that he had heard something calling, for the sound was lost against the sweep of wind coming up the gorge. Something calling there in the night of the mountains as he himself had called when he rode so wildly in the quest for McGurk. How long ago had that been?

But it came once more, clear beyond all doubt. He recognized the voice in spite of the panting which shook it; a wild wail like that of a heart-broken child, coming closer to him like some one running: "Pierre! Oh, Pierre!"

And all at once he knew that the moon was broad and bright and fair, and the heavens clear and shining with golden points of light. Once more the cry. He raised his arms and waited.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CROSS GOES ON.

SO Mary, running through the wilderness of boulders, was guided straight and found Pierre, and before the morning came, they were journeying east side by side, east and down to the cities of culture and a new life; but Jacqueline, a thousand times quicker of foot and surer of eye and ear, missed her goal, went past it, and still on and on, running finally at a steady trot.

Until at last she knew that she had far overstepped her mark and sank down against one of the rocks to rest and think out what next she must do. There seemed nothing left. Even the sound of a gun fired she might not hear, for that sharp call would not travel far against the wind.

It was while she sat there, burying Pierre in her thoughts, a white shape came glimmering down to her through the moonlight. She was on her feet at once, alert and gun in hand. It could only be one horse, only one rider, McGurk coming down from his

last killing with the sneer on his pale lips. Well, he would complete his work this night and kill her fighting face to face.

A man's death; that was all she craved. She rose; she stepped boldly out into the center of the trail between the rocks.

There she saw the greatest wonder she had ever looked on." It was McGurk walking with bare, bowed head, and after him, like a dog after the master, followed the white horse. She shoved the revolver back into the holster. This should be a fair fight.

"McGurk!"

Very slowly the head went up and back, and there he stood, not ten paces from her, with the white moon full on his face. The sneer was still there; the eyelid fluttered in scornful derision. And the heart of Jacqueline came thundering in her throat.

But she cried in a strong voice: "McGurk, d'you know me?"

He did not answer.

"You murderer, you night-rider! Look again: it's the last of the Boones!"

The sneer, it seemed to her, grew bitterer, but still the man did not speak. Then the thought of Pierre, lying dead somewhere among the rocks, burned across her mind. Her hand leaped for the revolver, and whipped it out in a blinding flash to cover him, but with her finger curling on the trigger she checked herself in the nick of time. McGurk had made no move to protect himself.

A strange feeling came to her that perhaps the man would not war against women; the case of Mary was almost proof enough of that. But as she stepped forward, wondering, she looked at the holster at his side and saw that it was empty. Then she understood.

Understood in a daze that Pierre had met the man and conquered him and sent him out through the mountains disarmed. The white horse raised his head and whinnied, and the sound gave a thought to her. She could not kill this man, unarmed as he was; she could do a more shameful thing.

"The bluff you ran was a strong one, McGurk," she said bitterly, "and you had these parts pretty well at a standstill; but Pierre was a bit too much for you, eh?"

The white face had not altered, and still it did not change, but the sneer was turned steadily on her.

She cried: "Go on! Go on down the gorge!"

Like an automaton the man stepped forward, and after him paced the white horse. She stepped between, caught the reins, and swung up to the saddle, and sat there, controlling between her stirrups the best-known mount in all the mountain-desert. A thrill of wild exultation came to her. She cried: "Look back, McGurk! Your gun is gone, your horse is gone; you're weaker than a woman in the mountains!"

Yet he went on without turning, not with the hurried step of a coward, but still as one stunned. Then, sitting quiet in the saddle, she forgot McGurk and remembered Pierre. He was happy by this time with the girl of the yellow hair; there was nothing remaining to her from him except the ominous cross which touched cold against her breast. That he had abandoned as he had abandoned her.

What, then, was left for her? The horse of an outlaw for her to ride; the heart of an outlaw in her breast.

She touched the white horse with the spurs and went at a reckless gallop, weaving back and forth among the boulders down the gorge. For she was riding away from the past.

The dawn came as she trotted out into a widening valley of the Old Crow. To maintain even that pace she had to use the spurs continually, for the white horse was deadly weary, and his head fell more and more. She decided to make a brief halt, at last, and in order to make a fire that would take the chill of the cold morning from her, she swung up to the edge of the woods. There, before she could dismount, she saw a man turn the shoulder of the slope. She drew the horse back deeper among the trees and waited.

He came with a halting step, reeling now and again, a big man, hatless, coatless, apparently at the last verge of exhaustion. Now his foot apparently struck a small rock, and he pitched to his face. It required a long struggle before he could regain his feet; and now he continued his journey at

the same gait, only more uncertainly than ever, close and closer. There was something familiar now about the fellow's size, and something in the turn of his head. Suddenly she rode out, crying: "Wilbur!"

He swerved, saw the white horse, threw up his hands high above his head, and went backward, reeling, with a hoarse scream which Jacqueline would never forget. She galloped to him and swung to the ground.

"It's me—Jack. D'you hear?"

He would not lower those arms, and his eyes stared wildly at her. On his forehead the blood had caked over a cut; his shirt was torn to rags, and the hair matted wildly over his eyes. She caught his hands and pulled them down.

"It's not McGurk! Don't you hear me? It's Jack!"

He reached out, like a blind man who has to see by the sense of touch, and stroked her face.

"Jack!" he whispered at last. "Thank God!"

"What's happened?"

"McGurk—"

A violent palsy shook him, and he could not go on.

"I know—I understand. He took your guns and left you to wander in this hell! Damn him! I wish—"

She stopped.

"How long since you've eaten?"

"Years!"

"We'll eat—McGurk's food!"

But she had to assist him up the slope to the trees, and there she left him propped against a trunk, his arms fallen weakly at his sides, while she built the fire and cooked the food. Afterward she could hardly eat, watching him devour what she placed before him; and it thrilled all the woman in her to a strange warmth to take care of the long-rider. Then, except for the disfigured face and the bloodshot eyes, he was himself.

"Up there? What happened?"

He pointed up the valley.

"The girl and Pierre. They're together."

"She found him?"

"Yes."

He bowed his head and sighed.

"And the horse, Jack?" He said it with awe.

"I took the horse from McGurk."

"You!"

She nodded. After all, it was not altogether a lie.

"You killed McGurk?"

She said coolly: "I let him go the way he let you, Dick. He's on foot in the mountains without a horse or a gun."

"It isn't possible!"

"There's the horse for proof."

He looked at her as if she were something more than human.

"Our Jack—did this?"

"We've got to start on. Can you walk, Dick?"

"A thousand miles now."

Yet he staggered when he tried to rise, and she made him climb up to the saddle. The white horse walked on, and she kept her place close at the stirrup of the rider. He would have stopped and dismounted for her a hundred times, but she made him keep his place.

"What's ahead of us, Jack? We're the last of the gang?"

"The last of Boone's gang. We are."

"The old life over again?"

"What else?"

"Yes; what else?"

"Are you afraid, Dick?"

"Not with you for a pal. Seven was too many; with two we can rule the range."

"Partners, Dick?"

How could he tell that her voice was gone so gentle because she was seeing in her mind's eye another face than his? He leaned toward her, thrilling.

"Why not something more than partners, after a while, Jack?"

She smiled strangely up to him.

"Because of this, Dick."

And fumbling at her throat, she showed him the glittering metal of the cross; an instinct made him swerve the horse away from her.

"The cross goes on, but what of you, Jack?"

"God knows," she said, "not I!"

And a long silence fell between them.

(The End.)

Hands by

Gilbert Riddell



I.

RODNEY FOSTER was a scissors-grinder—the scissors-grinder of Haggars County. Just as his father and grandfather had been before him.

He had inherited the route and the apparatus from his father—and nothing else. In dying, the older Foster had assumed that that was a considerable inheritance. In living, Rodney had bitterly sworn that it was not even an existence.

The inhabitants of Haggars County had lost track of the number of times young Foster had tried to break away from his fate—and been dragged back to Haggars County by that fate. He wanted to get away—he wanted to be something else—something better—but neither he nor any one to whom he applied knew what that something better was.

Above all he would like to get his hands clean, and keep them that way.

The time had passed when he could recall exactly the color of his digits. An eternity separated him from his present state and the purity of his infantile attempts at cleanliness. Those would hardly have gained recognition from the more sanitary, but they were a long way ahead of anything he attempted now. What was the use, he asked himself bitterly, when the kind of work he had to do simply filled the pores with a sort of gray grime that no human agency could permanently remove?

It was a fine day in early summer. Rodney was trundling his knife-grinding appa-

ratus leisurely along—not because he feared to miss a hail from any of the farmhouses set well back from the road. There was no chance of that; Rodney was the animated weekly of Haggars County. With patience—for Rodney never told more than he could help—all the news could be extracted from him. If there were many knives to grind, the farmer's wife could liven up her day by teasing Rodney about the county belles whom he refused to notice.

Later, he would trundle his apparatus back over the same road, under the summer stars, staring savagely at them, trying to read the riddle of his fate by their twinkling light—back to his lonely cabin. Only Rodney knew how lonely it was.

And of course it need not have been—Rodney could, as his father and grandfather had done before him, have married a bright, lively country girl who knew all about housekeeping and raising children, thereby filling his life with sufficient protection against being alone.

But this, Rodney instinctively felt, would not protect him from loneliness. He couldn't endure the giggling chatter of any of the county girls now—how could he later endure their nagging and fault-finding?

No, he would see it out alone, hoping that some time, some day, fate would show him the way out.

And then he turned a bend in the road and came upon fate.

Not immediately recognizing the answer to his prayers, he stopped short in the road and stared at the stranger. Such a stranger!

Not only were his clothes new, but they were odd—the latest city fashion, Rodney supposed, in his ignorance; and he wore a hat, a gorgeous affair of milk-white straw and varicolored ribbon band—in the summer when all Haggars County economized on headgear.

And not only would the stranger's clothes have aroused any one's regard, but he was engaged in a pursuit almost unknown to Haggars County; he was seated calmly on a rock, overlooking the loveliest but poorest valley in the State, playing a violin.

There was no ethical aversion to curiosity or its frank expression in that poor farming district. Rodney left his scissors-grinder in the road and drew near the wonderful stranger.

Quite close to him he paused, his face flushing; for the first time he noticed the stranger's hands. They were long, slender, and white as snow. Just such hands as Rodney wanted to have.

The music took hold of him, shook him out of his country-shyness—unusual emotions swept him clean of reserve, forcing him into new lines of thought. If he had hands like that, perhaps he could play like that; and how godlike to be master of such divine sounds! How even the stars must envy this man his marvelous ability!

When the music ceased he broke into expression.

"I wish I could play like that," he said and then and there sealed his fate.

The violinist appeared neither startled nor annoyed. He put his violin down and threw up his hands. Up went his black eyebrows at the same time. He tossed his head and shook it violently. Any one of his friends could have told you that all these were signs that the musician was flattered.

"Ah!" he breathed, with just a tinge of accent. "There are many who would like to play like I." He shook his head again. "Kings who would give their kingdoms to play as I; they have told me so."

He looked at Rodney as if daring him to deny this. Of course Rodney wouldn't have dared; besides, he was busy watching the light play on the white skin of the man's hands.

"Ah!" breathed the musician again. "You look at my hands. Yes, they are remarkable; casts have been made of them—to give to kings." He paused, smiling benevolently upon Rodney. Surely he was being gracious, talking of his royal acquaintances to this dirty country boy, and the violinist fancied himself as a gracious person.

"And you—you"—he went on gently, sadly, sympathetically—"you want to play like me? With hands like yours?" He smiled and shook his head.

Rodney flushed and clenched his hands. He hated them himself, but this was the first time that any one else had dared to ridicule them. "My hands are all right," he said savagely.

The musician regarded him seriously. "Let me see," he said. He had taken Rodney's first remark as an indication that the boy had the ambition to play the violin. With this idea in mind he took one of Rodney's grudgingly bestowed hands in his.

"To me," he went on pompously, as he turned the hand about, "my art is everything. I am not like some musicians—jealous. I am a great musician; if you have a good hand I will tell you. Yes, I will even teach you—myself."

He looked at Rodney to see if he appreciated this tremendous magnanimity. As Rodney was speechless with astonishment at the suggestion that there was a chance for him to become a musician, he took that fact as a tribute to his generosity and his greatness.

"Yes," he cried, "yes, you are right. It is a good hand—a musician's hand. But how is it that you keep them like this?"

Looking up, he followed the direction of Rodney's glance—observed the gleam of hatred that shot from it as he indicated the scissors-grinder.

That was enough; he flung Rodney's hand from him with a flourish. He arose and gathered the violin to him with one hand, while with the other he gesticulated in a kind of fury.

"Ah!" he cried. "That is it. That is how you waste your life and your talent. That is bad, very bad. So long as you

sharpen knives you can never be a great musician. Why," he went on, gathering force and fury, "so long as you do anything mechanical you can never be anything. Who are the masters of the world? The men who keep their hands clean and make others do the dirty work. The men who sit in their offices and do not even sign their checks, lest ink should soil their dainty hands. The artists, like I, who can play the world to its knees, with our clever, clean, clean hands. My boy, you make me sad!" Moisture was gathering in the musician's eyes—to Rodney's supreme astonishment.

"Look at you!" he went on, looking himself at Rodney and discovering new things about him every second. "You are young, perhaps twenty; you are tall; you have the good figure; you have the fine face—if it was clean; the thick hair, it waves, like mine. Why, you look the artist—you have the hands of the artist! Yet you are content to waste your life doing this dirty work!"

The musician positively moaned as he finished. His last words stung Rodney to a quick response.

"I am not contented," he cried. "I've tried to get away, but I can't—I can't."

However much the musician might have been playing to his audience of one, that cry of Rodney's was so real that he responded to it with his genuine artist's soul.

"My boy," he cried, "you can. Do not wait for some one to show you the way. Leave this; come to the city; get a clean job, and then, when your hands are clean, come to me. Here is my card."

Rodney took it eagerly.

"The city is so hard," he began.

The musician waved away that objection. "It is easy—easy to one who is young and good-looking and talented—like you. This is the hard place—this beautiful country. This is where talents die early and unnatural deaths because of the waters of criticism and the fire of discouragement through which only the hardest can pass, and which are native to the country."

The violinist fastened his case. "This," he said, indicating the lovely valley, "is fine for dreams, so I come, sometimes, to

dream. But for work, for success, for money—never! Go to the city! Don't be discouraged. You have the hand of success—when it is clean."

He turned and walked to a small car Rodney had failed to observe before, and got in, smiling encouragement over his shoulder as he drove away.

So not only was this great violinist able to wear fine new clothes and jeweled rings, but he owned the latest type of roadster. Like most country boys, Rodney knew the names and latest types of all cars.

Rodney stood stock still in the road, watching the faint cloud of dust that followed in the musician's wake. When that had entirely disappeared he glanced down savagely at his hands, then turned and looked with hatred at his grinder.

Suddenly his jaws set, his feet broke into a run. Back he went over the road that he had come, leaving the detested wheel forever behind him.

There was a tobacco-jar at home that contained some money—enough to buy a ticket from Hopewell Junction to the city, and to live on for a week or two, even if living in the city was as high as he had heard.

There was even a cake of soap, long unused, lying near it.

When Rodney had worn this down considerably he brushed his clothes, found an old hat, and set out for Hopewell Junction, without a thing but his pipe and the flaring ambition that the musician's words had roused in him.

II.

WHEN Rodney had finished gaping at the tall buildings, and had found out how to cross the streets without being rescued from sudden death by a policeman, he began to realize that he had no place to sleep that night.

When he had found a place to sleep he realized that it was not at all like his little cabin on Twin Mountain. It was not lonesome—at least, the sounds of quick, nervous chatter, frequent laughter, were very grateful to his ears. He had never heard people talk and laugh like that before, and he liked it.

But there wasn't air enough; and then he had a hungry wish to get into closer touch with these humans, whose mere externals appeared so fascinating. Besides, never having felt the necessity of speaking to any one up on Twin Mountain, he longed to talk to some one now.

He only got as far as the front stoop when some one—miracle of miracles—spoke to him.

He stopped short and looked down at the speaker. The flickering light from the street-lamp suggested that the individual was a girl. At least her remarkably scanty lower garment was not divided—it would have passed anywhere for a skirt.

Personally, Gladys Brannigan considered it a clever copy of a "real" French model, and if she had told Rodney this he would have been prepared to believe her. She looked absolutely different from any country girl he had ever seen; therefore, he knew she must be all right.

"Lookin' for yer luggage?" was the question with which Gladys had greeted him. She intended this for sarcasm, because she had observed his meeting with the landlady and knew that Rodney had no such thing.

But Rodney was incapable of appreciating her sarcasm. Besides, he was busy admiring her voice; he liked her sharp, crisp accents of it. There was something about its tones that suggested a fascinating experience with life.

"Hot, isn't it?" she asked, as Rodney said nothing.

Rodney nodded. The happy possessor of the "French" copy waved her hand toward the step she was lounging on.

"Sit down," she suggested, and Rodney obeyed.

"Rube, ain't yer?" she inquired cruelly. Rodney, being unfamiliar with that word, merely stared.

"From the country?" she softened it, repenting a little of being "mean" to this good-looking boy. Rodney sighed in the affirmative.

"Why did yer beat it?" she queried abruptly. But that didn't get her anywhere, either; Rodney had never heard that brevity is the soul of wit. So Gladys tried again.

"Why did you leave your happy home?" she asked.

"Because it wasn't happy," he replied briefly. "Besides, I came here to get my hands clean."

"Well," she gurgled, "so there's no soap left in the country! That's a new one."

Rodney frowned. He began to understand that she was trying to tease him. "There's plenty of soap in Haggars County," he said, "but it doesn't happen to be the kind I need."

Gladys observed the frown and the change of tone, and changed hers also.

"Got a job?" she asked, using the first thing that occurred to her as being sympathetic. Rodney shook his head.

"Oh, looking," she breathed more sympathetically. She knew what it was to look for jobs. "From the country and looking for 'a job," she said, shaking her head. "That's hard. What kind of a job do you want?"

"Anything—where I can get my hands clean," he replied promptly.

"Gee! You're goin' to look yer eyes right out of yer head then," she said, "'cause, speakin' either physically or morally, there ain't any of them jobs knockin' about."

"Well," he said, setting his jaw in a way that was rapidly becoming fascinating to Gladys, "I've got to find one—and I haven't much time."

"Oh," she breathed, "yer didn't bring the U. S. Treasury with yer, I understand. Well, kid, I'm goin' ter tell you now there ain't much about town that I don't know, an' if yer lookin' for a job where you can keep your hands clean, yer goin' ter go without one altogether, an' yer'll have a hard time even gettin' one where yer can keep them dirty."

But Rodney would not have his dream shattered.

"That's not what the violinist said," he stated doggedly. "He said that the city was the place to get clean jobs in, and that I would have no trouble at all."

"He said all that, did he?" exclaimed Gladys. "Say, he musta been a regular friend in need—coaxin' you away from yer happy home with that line o' talk. Now,

look here, kid, I like yer, and I'd like ter know yer better, but my honest-to-God advice is: beat it while the beatin's good."

Rodney, sensing her meaning, shook his head and told his story. "I shall stay here," he said determinedly, "until I get my hands clean; then the musician will teach me to be a great violinist, and I shall become successful and rich."

"Rich?" queried Gladys faintly. "At playin' the violin?" She folded her hands weakly together and leaned forward, gazing incredulously into the large, sincere eyes of Rodney Foster. "Do I get you, kid? Is me senses reliable? You expect to get rich playin' the violin?"

With a touch of annoyance at her lack of faith, Rodney told her with more detail the story of the musician and his encouragement of Rodney's secret ambitions to break away from his old life and win success in some better calling.

Gladys shook her elaborate coiffure of red-gold hair, and her tone was as gentle when she spoke as a mother's to a child whose illusions about life she loves and must shatter.

"Say, kid," she exclaimed, "you been done. Why, there ain't no musicians makin' money in this burg except the high-falutin' kind. How long you been playin' the fiddle?"

Rodney frowned at her persistent pessimism.

"I've never played it yet," he said quietly. "I've got to get my hands clean first."

Gladys drew in her breath with a sharp whistle; she was as serious as the tragic life of cities only can make the children of men.

"Say, kid, who was the long-haired idler that gave you this dope?"

Rodney drew the card reluctantly from his pocket and shoved it to her. "He said I had the hands, if they were only clean—the hands of an artist," he averred doggedly.

Even to Gladys this great name was familiar.

"Well, perhaps he knows," she said incredulously, "but if he don't— Say, kid,

you don't know what you're up against. Why—" She paused and looked at the rapt countenance of this unbelievable dreamer. Her tone dropped softly. "And there ain't no use tryin' to make yer understand," she said gently.

III.

BUT if she couldn't make him understand what he was up against, Gladys was determined, at least, to soften the blows that Rodney would get when he bucked up against that something that was beyond his comprehension.

Having ascertained the status of his funds, she set him upon the way of finding a job.

Grateful as Rodney was to her for her advice in this direction, he was more grateful for her companionship, and most grateful for her knowledge of the proper things wherewith to remove grime from grimy hands.

In fact, to her amazement and dismay, he showed far greater interest in getting his hands clean than in getting a job. He spent more money on soaps, pumice-stone, and toilet-water than he did on food, and paid little attention to Gladys's perpetual stories of the hardness of New York landladies.

Every day, somehow or other, Gladys scared up a job for him—a job which he failed to get either because the employer could not see Rodney in it, or because Rodney feared the employment would soil his hands—those long, slender, capable hands rapidly assuming the hue that he associated with the Sundays of his childhood.

And Gladys was educating him, although neither of them knew it. He had more grammar than she, and could have won any spelling contest with her, but she was teaching him that the words of the musician were true—the man with the clean hands was the man of success. Although she ridiculed him for pursuing his object so relentlessly, he caught her glancing now at his hands with something of admiration—and he was not averse to Gladys's admiration.

But Gladys held determinedly to her position—he could never make money as a violinist. There were other clean-handed

jobs at which he could, though—and Rodney listened to her recital of them.

"There's bookkeeping," she said.

"How much can you make at that?" asked Rodney.

"Well, not a fortune," admitted Gladys unwillingly, "but a good living."

"I could make that at scissors-grinding," he replied curtly, "according to Haggars County."

He had pretty much the same objection to everything she mentioned. All the clean-handed occupations would require training—so would playing the violin; none of them held the promise of the fortune that the musician had dazzled before his eyes.

Having acquired exact knowledge of Rodney's funds, Gladys knew when he had arrived at his last cent.

"Well," she said, somewhat peevishly, "you got to get somethin'. I bet you've cut yer last coupon, me lord."

"I've got fifty cents left," he replied unconcernedly.

Gladys blanched at this confirmation of what she knew must be the truth.

"Well," she said, "if you must make a fortune, you'd better make it quick. Our landlady ain't runnin' no home for talented but impoverished geniuses. Yer better take one o' those dirty-handed jobs—since the clean ones don't look good enough fer yer. I've read in the Sunday editions that Mr. H. Ford had awful dirty hands at one time, and look at the way he slings millions around now—right in the face of the dove of peace. You'd better go back to scissors-grinding."

But Rodney only smiled at her.

"Well," she said resignedly, "if I was you, I'd go to the guy that got yer into this mess and make him stake yer till yer get a job that suits him."

Rodney spread out his strong, capable, lean hands.

"I'll do that as soon as I get my nails white; I can't seem to get the dirt out from under them."

Gladys then raised her tone to convey sarcasm.

"All you need now, me lord," she said airily, "is a mannycure; it'll only cost yer fifty cents. An' I bet you're the guy that'll

spend yer last penny ter do wot yer set out ter do."

Rodney nodded.

"I am," he said quietly.

"Where can I get a mannycure?"

"I'll show yer in the mornin'," replied Gladys. "Then, when yer get it, go ter that crazy fiddler and demand yer fortune. An' if yer need any help carryin' it home, let me know. I'm off ter-morrow afternoon."

IV.

RODNEY paused outside the "mannycure's" and looked at his marvelous hands. They were as white as snow—most of his long, tough nails had vanished, but what was left of them was delicately pink and pure.

He had never seen such hands—never anywhere—except those of that great violinist's.

Gladys glanced at them admiringly, too.

"Nobody could resist yer now," she said, unable to restrain her sarcasm, however. Perhaps her resentment at Rodney's persistent pursuit of his ideal had a somewhat personal foundation. If this fairy tale should come true she could, as she remarked bitterly to her mirror, after leaving Rodney on his way to the musician's, see where *she* got off. And where she got off would be a long way from any great, successful, dreamy-eyed musician.

She left Rodney to his fate, armed, however, with so much good advice that she went away believing that when next she saw him Rodney might very possibly be started toward that goal where he would only retain a dim and distant memory of her.

The violinist was at home, and he had not forgotten his chance meeting with Rodney.

He said he was delighted to see him—and he really was. It added greatly to his secretly good opinion of himself that he should have given an embryo genius such good, such disinterested advice. It tickled his vanity that his chance words should have altered the whole course of a human life. Here, indeed, was a tribute not only to the power of his music—but to his personal power.

"My hands—" began Rodney.

The violinist interrupted him with a gurgle of delight. His chest expanded wondrously.

"Ah, my boy," he cried, "it is magnificent to see such ambition, such determination in a young man. Many, many can hear advice, but few can heed it. Yes, your hands are fine, wonderful; such power in them! A few years with me and you will be master of my art!"

Rodney smiled confidently. He had been right, after all, in spite of many moments of misgiving when he felt that he ought to listen to Gladys's advice and take a job that would show immediate results, instead of pursuing this dream.

"And now, my boy," the violinist picked up his sacred instrument and held it out to Rodney, "now show me what you know already."

"But," objected Rodney simply, "I have never played the violin—I don't know how."

For a moment there was a queer silence; then the musician remembered that Rodney had never said he could play, only that he wanted to; that he had such a desire to play that he had left his home and come to the city; and that he had marvelous hands.

"Then you have merely the ambition," queried the violinist, "and the hands? Also, of course, you must have the ear."

"The ear?" Rodney regarded him with some misgiving. He put up both hands and felt of his ears. Would he have to put his ears through some sort of transformation, too, as well as his hands?

The violinist pointed to the piano. "Perhaps you can play that."

"A little," Rodney admitted. "My mother had an old one. She taught me."

The violinist beamed again.

"Very well, sit down then; play something you know."

Rodney sat down, and as the only tune he could play was the national anthem, he began on that, rather remotely from the key in which it was written, or even one to which it might be transposed.

For a few phrases the musician listened incredulously. The extraordinary colors

began to change the aspect of his face, giving way at length to pure whiteness—the whiteness of contained fury. The great artist had lost his temperamental temper.

He seized Rodney by the collar of his coat and jerked him to his feet. He flung him around and held his face close to the boy's.

"So," he cried, choking with rage, "you come here to be a violinist—and you have no ear. You deceive me; you take my time; you listen to my music; you listen to my advice, and all the time you have no ear!"

He flung Rodney far from him then, and the boy began backing toward the door, realizing that his dream was being torn into a thousand ugly shreds.

But the violinist advanced upon him.

"Go, leave me, before I choke," he cried. "It is unbelievable; but I can see it all now. You have no ear; you are no artist. You have the soul of the business man. You want the results of my art, the fine clothes, the good food, the money. Of the art you know nothing, you care nothing. Go!"

And Rodney, having reached the door, went; he went rapidly for blocks before he stopped. And then he stood stock still and thought rapidly.

As has been noted, Gladys had been educating him—unconsciously. She had been educating him for just this tragic end to his dream. And so, after catching his breath and thinking all around it, it wasn't so very tragic after all.

In fact, in a few moments, it assumed a humorous aspect. Presently Rodney was laughing—not only at the recollection of the furious antics of the violinist, but at his own colossal ignorance, his utter folly in pursuing this dream, in spite of all Gladys's advice.

He could even laugh at his beautiful, white hands. Never had they been so clean before. Never had the hands of his relatives been as clean as that. He didn't belong among the clean-handed ones then, all right. He would get what he wanted just the same.

He walked on and on, glancing about him for signs of something that would direct his altered intentions, which were now to get a job—any job at all.

Presently he came upon a great shop where the inadequate force was sweating and swearing and crying for help to turn out more and ever more motor-cars for Uncle Sam. Matters had got so bad, in fact, that the foreman had hung a sign out:

"Help wanted on assembling parts."

Rodney, seeing it, paused and inquired what it meant.

A busy, perspiring man answered him: "We want men—to do anything. It's a great opportunity. You can rise here—quick—to a good salary. But—" he paused suddenly and glanced at Rodney's hands. He went on sarcastically: "You'll get your lily-white hands awfully dirty around here."

"Sure," said Rodney contentedly. "That's the way I like them best."

V.

A GOOD deal later—months, in fact—Rodney Foster opened the door of his own flat and called for his bride—she who had been Gladys Brannigan.

"I want to show you something," he said, when he had kissed her.

"And it's not here," he answered her breathless inquiry. "Get your hat on and come with me."

The way Rodney held her arm and squeezed it as they descended the stairs together suited Gladys very well. And the fact that at the door there was a taxi waiting to convey them to see Rodney's mysterious surprise, suited her equally well.

Gladys was getting used to the idea that Rodney would be a rich man some day, now that his hands had got back some of their old hue. He had risen from one job to the other swiftly, been snapped up by a rival concern, and even offered a share in the business.

"Because," as Rodney had told her, "the head of the firm says I've got brains—as well as hands."

There had been a hint for some time now that Rodney was going to open his own machine-shop, and Gladys had helped him save ardently to that desired end.

The taxi stopped, and Rodney helped her from it. He squeezed her arm and pointed triumphantly to a huge doorway in front

of them. "Look," he said, "what do you see?"

What she saw was an unmistakably new shop—a machine-shop. Over the door, in order to avoid any mistakes as to its special sphere of usefulness, there was a huge sign, which read:

BRANNIGAN'S MACHINE SHOP

R. FOSTER, Proprietor

Gladys caught her breath in sharply in her characteristic little whistle. "Why did you call it by my name?" she asked.

"Because you made it possible," replied her bridegroom; "because you showed me that a man can dream in deeds as well as sounds; that any hands are clean that are doing honest labor."

A mist swam before Gladys's eyes, and she said nothing.

"And the 'R. Foster, Proprietor,'" Rodney went on, "is my little joke on the public. It means proprietor of you, and everybody will think it means the shop."

Gladys's smile scattered the tears.

"You don't mind losing the dream?" she whispered softly.

Rodney shook his head heartily.

"I haven't lost it—I've captured it. I'm making money—that's all I wanted. As for my hands, I'm so busy getting them dirty with money nowadays I rather like them that way."

"If you'd been a great musician," she sighed, "I'd have lost you. That's why I couldn't bear to see your hands growing so white."

"You couldn't lose me, honey," averred Rodney, and only remembered just in time that they were standing in a public thoroughfare—or Gladys would have been richer by another kiss.

"And you don't regret anything?" she asked.

"Not me," replied Rodney, then frowned a little. "Yes, I do, too," he said. "Darn it, I regret that fifty cents I spent on the manicure."

The Race of the Giants

by Gibbs Huntly



THE big, air-driven schooner Lamson pushed her sharp bows into a berth at Pier 1 with scarcely a sound; just the low whistling exhaust from her huge compressors breathing a tired sigh at the end of her voyage.

With her moorings fast, Grim Dickson, valve-tender and roustabout, leaped from the rail to the dock, turned and cursed the schooner a vehement good-by, and strolled away, glowering his independence to the world.

He was feeling independent this morning in the possession of the dilapidated suit he wore, the month's pay he fingered in his pocket, and the prospective week's debauch in Baltimore.

That was twenty hours ago, only twenty hours, and now, ensnared in the drag-net of the Compulsory Labor Service, he, with others, was under escort to the headquarters of the distributing agency. Surely fate had flung a challenge in his face at the beginning of the year, for this was January 1, 1930.

Nothing in the human derelict line escaped the Compulsory Labor net. By-path loafers, sleek, white-fingered professional gamblers, hunger-bitten, whisky-soaked cowards (universal prohibition had failed to curb either desire or gratification), kitchen thieves—legitimate dog prey—shock-headed, blackened brake-beam busters, and

the common riffraff of the water-front—all squirmed in the net until examined and billeted by the men higher up.

The old-time tramp problem was solved, and out of this human drift, disciplined and trained, had come much of the help needed in carrying out the gigantic military and naval projects authorized by a progressive government.

This explains how it came about that Grim Dickson, bathed, barbered, and clothed, but still under escort, reported to Clark, foreman of the magnet works down on Light Street.

Clark scanned the card tendered and flashed a glance at the cynical, defiant face of the other.

"What did you do last?" he snapped.

"Tended valves on an air-floater."

"Before that?"

"Boiled tar in Carolyn."

"Before that?"

"Gobbler boss on a turkey-ranch."

"Before that?"

"Aw, go to blazes! I didn't come cause I wanted to."

Again Clark scanned the dark, saturnine face. "Come in," he ordered. "We'll take your resistance."

"What's that?" Grim's voice betrayed suspicion.

"Resistance? Oh, everybody can't work among magnets, so we test them."

"Hurt?"

"Not a bit. Take him along, Johnson," he directed an assistant, "and see what he can stand."

Thirty minutes later Johnson came back and presented his report.

"That's good," Clark approved, glancing with interest at Grim. "It's pretty near a record test. We'll keep you right here."

"Whut for?"

"To work."

"Work?"

"Yes. You're billeted for a year."

Grim glowered, glancing from Clark to the shops and back again. "Whar's my job?" he asked, eying Clark with distrust.

"In the power-house, working magnets. Very few men can stand the draw. When we find one that can we give him special instructions and a hundred and fifty a month. You're in line to work up." And he walked away, leaving Grim staring.

"One fifty a month!" Grim gaped. Fifty was all he claimed aboard the schooner. And work? He hated work, but he was in the net; there was no escape. And one fifty a month! Why! "Aw, he's stringin' me!" he growled. "A feller 'd be a bloom-in' millionaire in a week."

Gradually the fact rooted in his brain as true. He remembered now of rumors of fabulous wages paid by some of the new departments to men of questionable character and without experience. It had caused wonder in trampdom. And now—

"One fifty a month and in line to work up." He shook his head in doubt as he muttered the words.

Although he did not know it, this thought of working up, though it seemed out of place in his make-up, was the germ from which grew the second Grim Dickson.

Perhaps his immunity from magnet flow had to do with his mental attitude toward his work in the months that followed. It certainly was a source of pride to himself, as well as the envy of his fellow men. Ambition rooted and grew, and the work he once hated aroused his interest. Encouraged by Clark, his evenings became long hours of study, and the more he learned the harder he studied; until the subject of magnet flow became a near obsession,

and under Clark's tutelage he became an expert in magnet control, flow, and chording.

Nor was this all. During the last three months of his service year, Clark saw him well grounded in the principles of solar lighting, transmission, tunnel-ventilation, gas-protection. Also in the mechanism of certain intricate gages, automatic signal-takers, informers, *et cetera*, the most of which Grim could see no use for, and growled because of the time wasted in the study.

Among the workers in the power-house, the year drawing to a close had been six months of comment and mystery. Rumors had reached them of great tunnels and naval works planned by government heads. It was said that the human moles were burrowing at Columbus, Ohio; then whispers filtered through of mysterious underground workings about Indianapolis. From Springfield, Illinois, came the next report of strange mining activities, and even Topeka, Kansas, sent vague whispers East of shafts sunk and deep borings by experts who eyed reporters askance and were laconic and reticent in their speech.

Since the end of the world war, some ten years before, huge appropriations had been allowed for coast-defense work. The gigantic docks that absorbed Pratt and Light Streets, and could swallow a fleet of the largest forty-knot "subs" afloat, had ceased to be a wonder. The great air-tanks under compression from the Ohio River dams, and sunk deep near the water-front, had become a much-worn topic, and the arrival and clearance of monster air-driven naval craft failed to excite unusual comment.

A big transcontinental mail-carrying airship occasionally swung in over the city, her side fins showing long and slim against the sky, her white sails bellied out, and her engines sending down their murmuring whine.

Scarcely any one looked twice. 'Twas just a pretty sight in a busy world, and the human broil had little time for common things. Such engineering feats were only a part of the great work the nation had set herself to do, and the people approved the many great appropriations of Congress

through their confidence in the men higher up. Surely the nation had found its stride.

About this time Tom Dillon, red-faced, rotund, and rough, strolled into the powerhouse and had a talk with Clark. Afterward he walked over and stopped in front of Grim. For a few seconds he regarded the thin, wiry, solemn-faced Dickson with a whimsical smile.

"Hello, Dungeon!" he greeted bluntly. "What do you know about levers?"

"Levers?" Grim flashed him a contemptuous glance. "Nothin'. Un me name ain't no jail, neither!"

"Don't boil up," Dillon chuckled. "I'm chief on No. 66, Continental Tube Line. I'm short a second. Looking for some downy-faced kid to bring up. Been here long?"

"Six months," Grim lied, glowering.

Dillon blew a low whistle. "Too green to blossom," he taunted. "Now, what did Clark mean when he said a year? What was your business before they made you over?"

"Mindin' my own."

"Failed. Got away from you, didn't it? So you don't know levers?"

"Naw! Reckon it's a pole to pry wit out of fat folks, ain't it?"

Dillon laughed. "Say," he hesitated, evidently estimating Grim's possibilities, "you'd have to sign for three years, but it's a job you'd like. You're blamed lucky to get the chance."

"Me time's up next week," Grim reminded. "I can get out if I want to."

"'Course. But you won't," Dillon said. "Do you want to go back to this?" He passed Grim a card as he spoke.

Grim took the card and stood staring, his eyes flashing from Dillon to the bit of pasteboard in his hand. It was himself he saw just as he was when the drag-net gathered him in. Ragged, unkempt, debauched, half sober, hungry, hopeless.

"Ah!" he gritted. "Ye're tryin' to h'ist me. That's not meself!"

"It was," Dillon asserted.

With an oath Grim raised his hand to dash the picture to the ground.

"Wait!" Dillon's command arrested the hand an instant. "The other side."

Grim turned the card and the picture showed a young man neatly dressed, barbered, manlike, respectable, clean; himself. He stared hard at the picture, a dozen times it turned in his hand, a dozen glances showed the contrast, a dozen times the old life came, appealed, and was outbidden by the picture on the other side.

"What 'd I have to do?" he asked.

"Hold your nerve—main thing. You've resistance enough to make a fairly good lever man."

Grim hesitated, pondering. The three years didn't really count for much. This place had become the only home he had ever known. Then Dillon had said the job was a good one and he was lucky. Somehow he felt like trusting this big, good-natured Dillon who laughed at him.

"The pay starts at two hundred a month," Dillon was saying. "Clark will have you enrolled in the morning."

"No. 66, Tube Line?"

"Yes. In the morning," and Dillon swung away, leaving Grim pondering to himself.

"What was No. 66, anyway? Continental Tube Line?" It was all very hazy. Just one fact stood out clear and enticing, and Grim was human. "Two hundred a month!" he gasped. "Reckon it's my chance."

The next morning when he reported, a waiting official took him to an office where his papers were signed, and he was referred to Dillon for orders.

They crossed the yards, dodging the swinging cranes, and went down to the water-front and stopped before a passageway where armed men stood guard. Through this they hurried and across a trestle that spanned great stores of merchandise and onto a moving stairway that lowered them to the docks below. They skirted the mass of concrete that held back the waters of the basin and descended a broad incline that led them to the subway floor.

On the subway level Grim stood blinking, mind befogged, gaping with astonishment.

They were entering an excavation acres in extent in which men moved about like flies. Above them monster cylindrical cars

with pointed ends hung from overhead tracks. Long rows of pillars supported the roof, and the solar lights blazing from the storage-tanks rivaled day in this subway world.

At the further end the excavation closed into a steel tube forty feet in diameter; the distant end, apparently the size of a dollar, marked the direction of the Tube Line the projectors had kept secret so long. Heavy steel flanges projecting from the sides of the tube formed safety tracks for the cylindrical cars, and heavy magnets from fenced enclosures furnished power to switch from track to track.

"Wha—what is it all?" Grim stammered.

"Oh, come on!" Dillon laughed. "You haven't begun to see things yet. Keep clear of that magnet draft. The power's on. Our job is over here," indicating a long, sharp-nosed car, already in the guides. "And there seems to be something on."

A group of officials surrounded Dillon as he approached, and a hurried consultation ensued.

Grim scarcely noticed them. He was staring about, wondering, amazed. A peculiar tremor gradually drew his attention: a tremor that increased its vibrations and seemed to become a part of a whining, humming sound. Away down at the western end where the tube seemed but a section of a three-foot smoke-stack, something was moving. At first the tube itself seemed telescoping back upon them, then out of the tremor and hum flashed something long and pointed that rapidly took the form of a cylindrical car charging toward them at a comet's speed, its lights shearing ahead in whitened beams. Out of the tube it flashed, supported by the guides, and hummed quivering to a rest a hundred yards away.

"Aw!" snorted Grim, rubbing his eyes. "I'm jist seein' things!"

"Eastbound arrived," Dillon mentioned at his elbow. "Come on, we've got to spruce up for a fast run."

Grim stumbled after him into the lever-room of the long car, and glanced at the magnets.

"Same as you cut your teeth on in the power-house," Dillon grinned. "Gages, too; receivers, informers, everything the

same. Begin to see what Clark had in mind, eh? Keen fellow, that Clark. We're in for a big job, Dungeon.

"Listen! The Blue Dome Aerial Company and the White Cloud Company have had mail contracts for four years. Their time runs out next month, and the Postal Department folks want to know how much transit time they gain by using the Tube route. See?"

"Not much. Reckon mebbe it sounds like a race."

"That's it," Dillon gritted. "It's a race. The two air companies start two of their fastest cloud-busters the minute we slide out of here. They relay four times. We've got to stick it out all the way *through*. Get a move on. Have to adjust everything. Set the gages and test the needles; move that informer over under the record and brush up those dials. We don't want to look twice when this old steel-backed snail gets to a sliding down her shell-case."

Grim's finger tapped Dillon's shoulder and their glances met.

"Whar 'd yo' mean when yo' said: 'Stick it through'?" he asked.

"Frisco!" Dillon barked. "Pacific Coast!"

"Frisco!" Grim remembered a tough in New Orleans who spoke of Frisco. It seemed the other side of the earth to him, and he eyed his chief in doubt.

"This is a fairly long hole," Dillon grinned. "See over there where she draws down to a mouse-hole? That's the way she looks for about three thousand miles."

"Underground?"

"All the way. Just a few chasms bridged. Watch that gage on the air-tanks, both pumps working now. Dungeon, it's a big thing to run a car and be sort of a partner in this bully old soldier slide. That test of yours did it."

Grim didn't answer. He was staring down the tube to the diminutive hole in the distance.

"Hell!" he blurted. "What a burrow!"

"We start in ten minutes," Dillon said.

"How long will we be goin'?"

"Wait and see. Time to hurry now. Connect those crisis lights to the drums and test them out."

For a moment Grim thought of a possible escape, but this fellow, Dillon, had a way of taking things as a matter of course; evidently he expected his second to prove equal to the task assigned, and there was scant time for reflection.

"Get your protector on," Dillon was saying. "Here comes our mail."

A glance back showed a dozen men throwing mail-sacks into the car.

"They're going through with us," Dillon explained. "Fine helpers, and department men."

"Reckon they've been through before?" Grim questioned.

"Two of them. We're about ready now," Dillon said, glancing through his window into the car. "Just sit quiet for a hundred miles and watch the gages."

The last mail-sack thumped upon the floor. The men took their seats and the steel door slid shut with a bang. A sharp gong tanged, and the letters stood out clear on the order dial: "All clear. Go!"

Dillon pushed a button and the letters dropped into the record-box. A pull on a lever, and the big magnets swung around, caught the invisible flow, and the car began to move ahead.

"Burrow, you old shell-backed badger!" Dillon growled. "It's your job! Dig!"

Grim gestured his astonishment. There was no jerking motion, scarcely any vibration, just a sliding movement as of a great piston drawn through an endless cylinder.

Dillon drew his protector over his head and shook himself into the folds of the garment; locked one lever in its clutch and, with a hand on the other, watched the gages as their speed increased. The solar lights began to flash by with second intervals between, imperceptibly they grew into a flashing chain, every link a leaping light; then to a shining white bar, and the car was shooting through a blazing tube that rushed toward them, closed over them, yet kept just beyond their touch.

Grim's first trip promised surprises as to speed. The hand on the speed-dial jerked crazily, swung around to one hundred and twenty to thirty—fifty—seventy—ninety—two hundred and twenty. The steady hum became a whine as the air friction raked

her steel skin, and Dillon smiled his approval.

Grim could only sit, gape, and wonder. Inside the car they felt no air motion, no consciousness of such terrific speed. The mail clerks sat leaning forward, muscles tense, staring with eyes that glanced neither to the right nor left, but rested, fastened on that column of blazing light into which they rushed with the speed of a thunderbolt unloosed.

"Ridin' to hell on a streak of lightning!" Grim muttered. "Next station 'll be Brimstone!"

For a time he watched, unable to take his eyes from the never-changing blaze in front, and Dillon's touch on his shoulder scarcely aroused him.

"Don't get the stare," Dillon cautioned. "Look about you, at the gages, back in the car, anything, until you can control your eyes."

The former gong rang, and a slight hissing sound followed.

"Catch that message," Dillon ordered, "and let the record take it."

Grim read the message:

"The Blue Dome Company's racer, Scud, and the White Cloud Liner, Falcon, left on our time. East wind blowing hard in the lower lanes."

Dillon muttered something under his breath. "It's luck for them," he said with a frown. "That wind's a big push, but they'll catch a westerly this side the Rockies."

"Where are we now?"

"Under the Alleghenies," Dillon laughed. "We keep this level to Station 5."

"Whar's Station 5?"

"Indiana's basement. That's about all we know about the small stops. Take air there and chord magnets for Kansas City."

"When you goin' to let me have them levers?" Grim coaxed. "I'm no good doin' nothin'."

"Try her now," Dillon agreed. "She handles like a top on a parlor table. Get the feel of her first. Careful of your check now. Let her have her nose a little, steady her on the dips, and you have her. Brakes? Yes, but the check controls her mostly.

Watch the dials and gages. It doesn't take long to find her variations."

"How long's this burrow been dug?"

"Not long. Just a few trial trips through. Guess we'll know more when they get done sending soldiers through."

Grim shook his head. "Cost a pile!"

"It did. Upkeep is small, though, compared to surface roads, and since we scrapped that old coal-waster, electricity, the expense is cut in halves again. Think of it, Dungeon! Tapping the balance power of the universe and hitching the invisible threads to the nose of this old ground-hog like a scent to draw her across a continent."

"Ever think of the supply? Worlds whirling in space millions of times faster than this, for millions of years, and the power still as strong; no loss from friction, no drop of potential, no deterioration from age. Say, Dungeon, I wonder if our famous old inventors don't want to be kicked across the Hudson River for spending so much study on electric force when real power was fairly banging them in the face? Great men, though!"

"Reckon they reached out over too fur," Grim reflected, locking his lever another notch. "Like givin' a sweet-'tater patch the go'-by to beg a snack from a mansion. We always went back to the patch."

"It's the reversion of principle they overlooked," Dillon said. "Production against reduction. It requires power to produce electricity, to maintain, to develop, to compel it to do specified work. Magnetism requires appliances to reduce, to check, to control, to rein in, to master. Why, it costs more to hold back this old rooter than it does to send her through the burrow at two hundred miles an hour. What a blunt, obstinate thing a human mind is when it slumps into the rut of common custom. There goes that informer again!"

He leaned over, listening as he spoke.

"Scud relays at Columbus. Falcon not in sight yet."

"Hello! Here's another!"

"Meet No. 48 eastbound at Station 10."

"Aw, rot! I thought it was a clear right-of-way, and Murphy's always twenty sec-

onds late. We're due at Station 5 in two minutes."

He took the levers from Grim and glanced through the agate windows ahead. It seemed a long wait before the red bar flashed through the white glare, and Dillon, with a curt: "There she goes," swung the levers forward and the long, quivering car began to slacken speed. The friction whine droned to a hum, and the tube glare became chains again, whose links lengthened to solar lights a hundred yards apart.

There wasn't much to Station 5. Just a square excavation fifty feet beneath the surface with a steel office and a circular air-shaft leading up from the big fans.

"Couple on the hose and pump the tanks full while I look for orders," Dillon said, swinging down to the landing. "And don't let those mail clerks into the lever-room!"

The air-tank gages showed maximum pressure when Dillon returned three minutes later and seized the levers. "The Scud is in sight now," he growled. "And the Falcon's trailing. We've got to give No. 66 her head. Valves tight?"

Grim nodded, and they drew away for Station 10.

"If we only didn't have to meet the east-bound," Dillon grumbled, shaking his head.

"Whar's Station 10?" Grim asked.

"Springfield," Dillon gritted. "We've got to beat them there. After that they'll likely have to lose minutes jockeying for wind."

During the run Grim, from his seat facing the dials, watched, half fascinated, half terrified at the lightning speed. The varying whine of the air seemed playing a dirge about them and the figure at the lever might have been an automaton with a stone face. He breathed heavily and cursed softly at the deadly *sameness*. On the surface where trains crawled across country at sixty miles an hour, moving pictures of rivers, woods, bridges, cities, farm life, and human beings presented variations. But the stultifying effect of the underworld and its sullen grimness gripped him, and he wondered if Dillon meant more than his words implied when he said: "Don't get the stare."

"Quit it, Dungeon!" he heard Dillon say. "Cut out the dead face, and help me here;

we're going to switch down to the lower guides."

Reaching above he grasped a lever and scanned the tube ahead. "Got her now?" he asked.

Grim nodded without speaking.

"Slack her up a bit, she'll take it easier." And when the red showed through the white blaze Dillon swung the lever. They felt a slight jar and the downward dip that told them they were in the lower guides.

"Steady now," Dillon coached. "Check her lightly and let her run until she begins to lift. She took the switch like a bird. Now cut off the flow. Easy now. You're a bit rough with cars, Dungeon, but it wasn't so bad."

They hummed to a stop in a deep extension below the main guides and rested, waiting for No. 48.

"Set the brakes lightly," Dillon directed. "When she rides over, the air wave cushions us back a few rods and we have to humor her."

They waited a few moments, Dillon pacing the floor and muttering under his breath: "That damned old trolley of a No. 48 is slower than the old Albany Express!" he growled. "And you can bet they're driving those cloud-busters. Crazy Joe Murray was to take out the Scud. He's the company's devil, and he'll drive her to the last ounce of compression. Here comes No. 48!"

Almost imperceptible at first, a faint tremor shook the car, and they watched ahead where the lower guides joined the main tube. Suddenly a gust of air whistled above them, rapidly growing stronger, and they stiffened in expectation. Another blast, and out of the roar a dark streak with a meteor's head shot toward, and over them, in one great leap that carried her from their sight.

The east-bound had come and gone.

"Gawd!" Grim gasped, his dark face tense, his eyes staring.

"The back draft!" Dillon yelled. "Your brakes! Hold her till the fluff passes. There, now slack her off a bit. Let her rest. You see, Dungeon, it might draw us from the switch."

"Do we go like that?" Grim gulped.

"More than that," Dillon grinned. "Quite a sight, isn't it?"

Grim set his jaw and muttered to himself as he swung the magnets, and they gathered speed for the run to Station 10.

Dillon eyed him with a whimsical smile. "It's so simple," he said. "Green second, just out of the shops, shooting a car through the earth, under rivers and lakes, across a continent at two hundred and fifty miles an hour. No complicated parts to fail, no jumping of tracks, no whistling for crossings, no snow-sheds or earth-slides, no wash-outs, no track-ballasting, and pretty near no experience.

"Say, Dungeon, when No. 48 climbed over us back there you saw the climax of an idea that will change the world's traffic system, and scrap-heap millions of dollars' worth of machinery. The fool days of coal, steam, and electricity are about over."

"Reckon it floored me," Grim admitted. "My hair ain't flattened down yit."

"There are other surprises," Dillon said. "But we'll run in now."

When the red signal came they shut off, and to Dillon's disgust had to nose in on half-speed.

"Open the dead-lights," Dillon ordered. "We want some real air. Big air-shafts here. Know where we are, Dungeon?"

They locked the levers and stepped down to the walk.

"We are directly under one of the big surface passenger-depots," Dillon said. "That thunder you hear is overhead traffic, and that gale of wind that smells so good comes from a shaft that goes straight up through the depot's room. Not even the builders knew its purpose."

He left Grim on the walk and hurried to the office.

He came back a few minutes later, biting his lip and scowling.

"The Scud relayed, and Murray's driving the Northern Light," he snapped. "She's fast! The Falcon went down, and 'Sky Tramp' Smith is driving the Condor in her place; she passed well south thirty seconds ago. We have to make Station 20 without a stop!" he barked. "Jam the air-tanks full and test out those crisis lights again. Old Mississippi's in full flood now,

and if anything happens to the dams our air pressure fails and then the lights."

"Whar's Station 20?" Grim asked.

"Salt Lake City."

"Whar 'd we chord?"

"On the run. Tanks full?"

"Ready to bust."

"Then we'll shoot along," Dillon said, seizing the levers. "There's another thing," he mentioned as they gathered speed. "A run like this sometimes breaks up a new man. Stop staring ahead. That's my job. We can't afford a case of tube trance on this run."

"Reckon I might wear blinders," Grim suggested, grinning. "What kind of a feller 'd it be that 'd keep his blinkers off of that?" he added, nodding at the tube ahead. "Aw! Don't worry, I ain't goin' dead none!"

Dillon shot him a glance and dropped the levers down to the stop. "Have to beat the fliers," he growled. "Can't take any risks. Half past twelve now. I've turned her loose."

The big car trembled and flashed ahead at a speed that made their former rate seem a dog-trot. The air screeched about them, and the vibrating car shook until speech became difficult. All about them something roared and hissed, even the lights seemed to shriek a protest, and ahead the tube was but a comet's tail of fire into which they rushed at three hundred and fifty miles an hour.

"Ho-aw lo-ong?" Grim stammered, clutching a stay.

"Till things go blue!" Dillon grunted.

"Kansas City in forty-five minutes. Catch that message!"

The informer was clicking rapidly:

Condor and Northern Light relay at Kansas City. Nothing in sight. Westerly winds in lower lanes. Flood serious. Power-house No. 8 threatened, dams breaking.

Dillon bit hard on a flexed lip. "Thirty minutes more and we take our compression from Council Bluffs," he said. "If No. 8 only holds!"

Grim stared ahead without speaking. "No matter how familiar one might become with the latent power of those instruments on the

surface, or how well one might be trained in their use; this use of that power to drive under mountains and prairies; this experience of underground flight was not only new and disconcerting, but, at the present speed, was appalling.

His groping thought had clutched the idea. This was a race without a competitor in sight. There was nothing to see but the blazing tube ahead. There was no glimpsing of flying-ships above, of specks in the sky shooting westward under the guidance of devil-brained pilots. Those "cloud-busters," as Dillon had called them, might be anywhere above them, leading, chasing; the specks in the sky and the subway car might be running neck and neck; he couldn't see the race, and the reports from the informer were as dry and unsatisfactory as the announcements from a megaphone.

"Whar 'd yo' reckon they be now?" he asked, striving to steady his voice.

"Behind or busted!" Dillon shouted. "No flying cart could make this speed and hold together. We're—oh!"

Without an instant's warning the tube lights went out and left them shooting into the tube ahead, into blackness so dense, so unexpected, so overpowering that for a moment they appeared helpless, paralyzed.

"The crisis lights!" Dillon yelled. "Turn on the lights!"

To Grim it seemed he never would find the valves, but in a few seconds the big drums sent out their beams and they saw the glare shearing the gloom from the tube walls far ahead.

"No. 8 is gone!" Dillon gritted. "Drums will light us for twenty minutes. After that we catch the solars from Council Bluffs."

They rushed on without a check, the crisis lights flaring ahead, Dillon grasping the levers, Grim bending over the informer listening for the click that foretold a message.

"Ought to hear something," Dillon said, uneasiness in his tone as he glanced at the depth gage. "We dip pretty soon for the river. There she goes!"

The informer had begun, and Grim was taking the message:

All clear at Kansas City. Northern Light and Condor relay here. Shooting Star and

Cloud Queen waiting. Drivers McBain and Wright going up. Nothing in sight yet.

"Scotty McBain, eh!" Dillon growled, glancing at the speed-gage. "They certainly picked the proper man. And Wright, too. Best air-current trailer in the West. Once clear of Kansas City we'll check her up, eat a bite, and when we strike the long level we'll lock her down."

They shot under Kansas City and through the subway tube at half-speed; then when the depth-gage showed an even forty feet they locked her down and settled themselves for the race to Station 20.

For half an hour they rushed ahead with hardly a variation in the scream of the air, or in the needle on the speed-gage. At an average depth of only forty feet they burrowed the plains of Kansas and Colorado in a direct line for Salt Lake City. The informer was silent. Nothing about them offered relief for their tired eyes; the blazing tube ahead seemed some devilish, persistent thing that hounded and laughed derisively in their ears.

Grim touched Dillon's shoulder. "Them fe-l-lers in th-ere," he chattered, glancing back into the car at the department men. "Reckon the-their he-heads 've gone ba-batty."

Dillon turned with a muttered curse. "Tube trance!" he snorted, noting the set, staring faces. "Company might have known better. Of course they can't stand it. Nothing for it but to shoot them through and leave them at Station 20. Don't look at them, they'll go down in a minute, and that 'll bring them out of it. Shutter the windows, that's the only thing."

"Reck-reckon I'm go-o-in' down my-myself so-o-n," Grim stammered, his eyes wide, his face white.

"Not by a blamed sight!" Dillon rasped, grasping a wrench. "You've got to watch that informer! The first time you freeze I'll bang your head with this wrench!"

Grim's eyes flashed anger, and his fists clenched.

"Look here, Dungeon! Are you a kid or a man? Do you want to lose this race or win it? Are you a quitter or are you game?

Stop that vacant staring and clean those dials; we want to know what we're doing. And shut up that teeth-rattling!"

Grim listened, open-mouthed, and then he reviled Dillon with all the superlative adjectives his tramp life had taught him.

Dillon smiled gleefully, and shot him a glance of approval.

"That's better," he mentioned. "There's good in your carcass yet if you can keep from bleating!"

They felt the lift of the grade, and Dillon knew they were in the foothills below Denver.

"Take these levers, Dungeon," he said. "There's a lot of climbing for us now, some dips, too. You'd better get used to them. I'll just blind your window," he observed, closing the shutter. "I can watch from mine, and you take it easy."

Grim reached forward and slammed the shutter wide open. "I c'n do me own watchin'!" he glowered. Whereupon, Dillon grinned and said something about mules.

The informer began to run and they caught the message:

Aircraft sighted high above the foot-hills; five miles south. Supposed to be the Shooting Star. None other in sight. Apparently light, southerly winds.

"Cloud Queen is trailing," Dillon said. "McBain will bring her up soon as Wright finds favorable currents. We've got our work before us, Dungeon, with ten minutes' stop at Station 20."

Under the mountains of western Colorado they flashed, across a few chasms bridged with a circular tube, under rivers and lakes, boring westward, shooting beneath the earth's surface, under deserts and wooded slopes, heights towering above them, and at their side barely fifty feet of rock between them and a cañon's brink.

"You're looking better, Dungeon," Dillon grinned. "I didn't know you knew so many choice adjectives. It's a shame to waste them underground."

Grim's mouth- corners twitched, but his eyes glowed solemn and steady. "It's hell when a feller feels it comin' on," he said, "un he's down here underground. Reckon it's like a buryin' before you're dead."

"Must be getting pretty near in. Suppose you send in and report us."

"What 'll I tell 'em?"

Dillon glanced at the mile-gage. "Tell them we'll look for signals in ten minutes," he said. "They're expecting us, anyway."

"Them fellers in there"—Grim indicated the car—"they're bumpin' round."

"Yes, they're comin' out of it. We'll leave them at Station 20."

They were both watching ahead now, both glad that the long lap was ended. Dillon glanced at the watch on the lever. "Four ten," he said. "Not a bad run."

Suddenly the red signal showed like a bar through the white, and they cut off the power, ran in slowly, and stopped in the guides. All about them in the huge excavation were men hurrying about, and two men in uniform appeared at the lever-room door.

"A dozen postal men floored in the mail-room," Dillon told them. "Need fresh men for the run through. Come on, Dungeon, we've got to have scenery."

He shouldered his way through the men about him and paused before a closed door. A few words, and the attendant passed them through. They entered a lift and began to go up—up. Gradually light, real daylight, crept down into the lift. It grew brighter. Still they went up and stopped. They stepped out on a great flat roof and looked down on the city below.

Both men shaded their eyes and drew full breaths of relief.

"Does get monotonous, doesn't it, Dungeon?" Dillon smiled. "We've ten minutes of this, so drink it down in gulps."

Grim was staring about the landscape, satisfaction depicted on his saturnine face. "Never thought the old world was sich a purty place before," he said, his lips nearing a smile. "Reckon most of us don't know what woods and hills are for."

"Certainly is a revive," Dillon agreed, his eyes scanning the horizon.

"Reckon we bore through off there?" Grim questioned, nodding toward the mountains. "Think of it!"

"Some one thought of it," Dillon replied dryly. "This is the world's greatest engineering feat—the tube and its power."

Grim didn't answer. He was staring at a hillside, his dark face twisted in suppressed mirth.

"What's the joke?" Dillon quizzed. "Spit it out; don't cramp your humor."

Grim pointed to where a surface passenger train was rounding a spur of hills at fifty miles an hour.

"Look at that old coughin', sputterin' old-fashioned contraption with her long string of glitterin' death-traps behind her," he snorted. "Movin' 'bout as fast as a bug on a wall. Jist two little humped-up rails un a few spikes between 'em and the morgue."

Dillon laughed. "Branch road running in. Haven't modernized her yet. Does look ridiculous compared with No. 66. There she is!" he shouted.

Down near the southeastern horizon a dark speck showed in the sky. It grew so rapidly as to cause Grim to gasp.

"Bet it's McBain with the Shooting Star," Dillon said. "He's driving her to the limit!"

"Other one a comin'!" Grim shouted, excitedly. "South and lower down. See?"

"You've got good eyes," Dillon approved, "I hadn't sighted her when you spoke. Suppose it's the Cloud Queen."

Both men watched them, striving for a line on their speed.

"Don't act as if they relay here," Grim suggested. "Them fellers ain't no notion of comin' down."

Dillon started. "If not, where would they relay?" he asked himself, and the answer suggested: "The Truckee River Dams."

"Come on!" Grim yelled. "Them fellers are climbin'! Let's get into our burrow!"

With a leap Dillon followed, and they dropped like plummets to the tube again.

In a few minutes they were ready for the last long leg of the trip, and drew away with a new force in the mail-car, with air-gages showing full pressure, and magnets drawing to delight the heart of a lever man.

"How long?" Grim asked.

"Frisco. Eight o'clock. Seven if we can make it."

"Them flyers got a big start."

"They did. Fooled us on that relay, but we can make time from here to Station 28—that's Carson. It's a good run. After that it's different, so we must shoot her along now."

"Didn't they strike any caves or nuthin' a diggin' this hole through?" Grim asked, his manner thoughtful.

"Dozens of them. Some day this will be advertised as the 'Underground Scenic Route,' and picnickers, hiking parties, mineral-hunters, wedding-trampers, and the whole grist of sightseers will do their stunts by solar light five thousand feet below the peaks. It will be something to see, Dungeon."

"Hope we take 'em through," Grim said. "I'd like to hear the 'Oh's!'"

"And the squeals," Dillon added.

On they flashed, the air whine and the roar the only sounds. Back in the mail-car the men were staring ahead, straight and stiff, without speech or action.

Dillon watched them, muttering to himself.

Grim slouched into his seat and tried to imagine how the world looked studded with mountains. He had never seen real mountains, and now he was shooting through them. It seemed so much like a dream—a dream in which those mail-men were dead folks that roared and whistled in derision, while one big fat fellow held the levers and guided them into a fiery lane that led somewhere, some place, and yet seemed to have no end.

With his eyes closed other pictures flashed before him, pictures of the old vagrant life in the South, of cotton-plantations, of tobacco-fields, of chilly nights under the stars, of nights when he huddled in disused tobacco-sheds, of mornings when his stomach cramped with hunger, of months aboard the coast trade tramp schooners, of revels on shore, of dirty police-courts where sarcastic judges with accumulative bumps pocketed his fine and sent him to jail for thirty days.

Then the power-house in Baltimore, and Clark. It seemed months since he was there. Yes, months. Time seemed to have blurred, and become mixed with the monotonous roar and hum.

"Wake up, Dungeon!" Dillon called. "You've been asleep an hour. That informer's chattering."

With a leap Grim staggered to the box and listened. "It's from Tahoe!" he said, astonished.

Fliers relayed at Truckee. Mad Eagle, with Tempest trailing, leaving here now. Drivers unknown. Northerly light winds.

"Say, Dillon, was I sleepin'?"

"Like a bear! We've come a long way while you was snoring. Passed Station 28, passed Truckee, and are now deep under the mountains."

"Then we're ahead of the fliers?"

"Think we are just now, but they'll have a clear, straight sweep when they reach the summit."

"Say! Let me have them levers un you take a snooze."

Dillon shook his head. "You can take the levers, but there'll be no sleeping from now on. The excitement's just begun. We'll hear from every village on the line now. There's another thing, Dungeon. We get bad air on this lap, not power enough on the fans or something; get compression from the Tahoe Dams, and it's not reliable."

"Bad air? What's the thing to do, then?"

"Drive her through and use the reserve-tanks. Maybe we won't have to. There's another message!"

"From Summit," Grim reported. "Go it, you old red-skinned badger! They're overhead, and driving like fiends. Lock her down another notch!"

Dillon grinned as Grim read the message. "It's Mike," he said. "He's whooping for us."

"They're hangin' to our wheel," Grim said. "Mebbe that other notch."

"Not yet," Dillon replied. "If I was sure about the air now."

Grim went over and tested the valves. "Dillon!" he yelled. "The pressure's gone from the tanks!"

"What's that? Pressure gone?"

"Not a pound! And valves tight."

With a leap Dillon reached the tank and shook the gage. The hand scarcely trembled and held its place.

"Shows full pressure," Grim commented.

"Tricked!" Dillon howled. "A plugged gage! Some devil from the air company did that in Salt Lake City, and we're here with empty tanks. If—if we get through some one— Oh, blazes!"

"What 'll we do?"

"Drive her through or die! Half an hour will tell," Dillon gritted, dropping the lever to the stop. "The dirty curs!" he snarled.

They flashed down the long slide to the danger level, the air tainting stronger every minute.

"We've got to make it!" Dillon fumed. "Next air comes from Rocklyn—foot of the mountains. Compression from the American River Dams at Folsom. We've got to stand it!"

"How much deeper?" Grim asked.

"A thousand feet!" Dillon coughed, glancing at the depth-gage. "If—if I should go down, Dungeon, for God's sake shoot her through!"

He stopped speaking and hung coughing over the levers. Grim watched, his breath coming in shortened puffs.

"It's mur-murder!" Dillon gasped.

"Shut up!" Grim flared, pushing him from the levers. "Talkin' wastes breath!"

Dillon slouched into his seat, gasping like a fish, his form trembling. Grim seized the levers and watched him, while the steel car, unloosed, shot ahead into the poisoned tube, shrieking like a demon on its way to a pit infernal.

Grim, though he did not know it, was now proving the benefit of a life spent in the open, of sleeping under the stars, and the test showed a lung resistance superior to the man nursed in the work-shops. Dillon was about all in.

"Reck-reckon a few—minutes—more—'ll see us through." Grim choked, striving to steady himself on the levers. She's—liftin' on the—climb. Wake up, Dillon!"

Dillon could only roll his eyes and gasp.

"Smells—better—now," Grim persisted. "She's comin' fresh."

With an effort, Dillon staggered to his feet, leaned against the wall with legs braced, and breathed the clean air that was percolating through the vents in front.

Gradually the stinging in his throat ceased, his breathing became more regular, and his eyes stopped smarting, but he remained weak and trembling.

"Better now?" Grim asked. "Reckon I'll catch that message," as the informer began to click.

"It's Auburn talkin'," Grim reported.

Fliers in sight six miles east. Driving to beat blazes. Hurry up! Valley Station's anxious!

"Tha—that's Ryan," Dillon said, his voice a stronger whisper. "Bully old Ryan!"

"Reckon I'll answer him," Grim said, touching the sending-lever and speaking into the tube. "He said they were anxious. Reckon I'd better not talk about air?"

Dillon shook his head. "Not yet," he said.

"Think you c'n handle these levers now?" Grim asked. "Them fellers back there"—jerking his thumb toward the mail clerks—"might need help."

"They're all right," Dillon rasped, staggering to the levers. "They didn't get much of it. The compartment's tight, and the vents are closed."

"Reckon the speed startled 'em."

Dillon's lip curved in a wry smile. "We did go a bit, but I couldn't have stood it much longer. You're a wonder, Dungeon."

Another message came clicking in. "Sacramento," Grim said.

Been trying to locate you. Fliers reported at Placerville. Heave up your anchor and come along!

"That's Brison. Used to be captain of a wind-jammer." Dillon grinned. "He thinks we're stuck somewhere."

They shot down the Sacramento valley and under the city, the informer clicking out its pleas, its demands, its cheers. Evidently all the private offices on the line were shouting at once. From behind them Sacramento caustically advised Dillon to "Lock her down another notch, and sleep when you get to Frisco. Them fliers are chasing you like hawks after a rabbit!"

"Come on!" Benicia pleaded. "Come on, No. 66. The world is waiting."

"Cross lots and climb the fences!" Oakland cut in. "Fliers brushing the tree-

tops at Benicia. Hurrah, No. 66! Come in!"

"Come out of your cave, you old gilded-nosed silver-tip!" San Francisco called. "Don't wait for spring! You're needed at the zoo."

To all of which Dillon shouted into the mouthpiece: "Shut up, you croakers, and keep the gate open!"

Grim trembled and his eyes glistened as he heard; his muscles jerked with impatience, his blood leaped. Already he imagined those fliers swooping above the terminals, he fairly choked with suppressed excitement. At last he was seeing the dust.

"Can't—can't I couple on the reserve-magnets?" he pleaded.

"Don't need them," Dillon smiled. "Run in in three minutes. It's about over, Dungeon, and you've stood it like a gray one. We're under the bay now."

They watched, expectant, while the long car roared and shrieked into the blaze ahead. Distinctly they felt the lift as the grade ascended, and they climbed the ascent without a check.

"There's the red!" Dillon shouted, as the signal flashed by, and with a long whistle of relief he swung the magnets back. The shrill air scream droned to a hum, and they shot out of the tube into the overhead guides of the "Frisco" yards.

There was a roar of voices about them as Dillon climbed stiffly down from the car. A dozen men seized him, jerked him about, all asking questions at once.

"Who won?" Dillon gasped, finding his voice.

"You did!" a uniformed official barked. "Twenty minutes to spare. A great race! Fourteen hours and seven minutes. It's a record, Dillon, a record!"

Dillon didn't reply. He was staring at

something in the lever-room, at Grim, slouched in his seat, white, his hands hanging limp and nerveless.

He fairly fought his way to the car, leaped inside, and seized Grim. "Help me here!" he yelled. "Second's gone under!" They carried him to a waiting-room and Grim opened his eyes in wonder.

"It's all right, Dungeon," Dillon assured. "We beat them."

Grim smiled weakly, but closed his eyes without attempting speech.

"Nerviest man I ever shot a tube with," Dillon explained. "You fellows don't know. Devils plugged our gages in Salt Lake and sent us out without air. In the deep dive the gas got us, and I went under. He brought us through and saved the race!"

"Aw!" Grim muttered. "It jist happened. I had to let her run."

On the surface that evening Dillon and Grim did the city, visited the aviation-fields, examined the big machines that had given them such a race, shook hands with the drivers, and talked over the events of the day.

"Man, but it's queer!" Malcom, the driver of Mad Eagle, was saying. "Nobody seems to know there's been a race. Think of it! Two world's records in one day, in the air and underground, and no one but the tube men seem to know. Those fellows about us don't know there's been a race. The papers don't mention it; no one speaks of it, the public is ignorant of it. Now what's the use of a sky man bustin' clouds for a record if he gets no credit for it? It's plumb disgustin'!"

"What is credit, anyway?" Dillon asked, his tone sarcastic. "Let me tell you, Malcom: the big war taught our government one great, vital lesson. Keep your big things underground."

"David Vallory" is now in book form

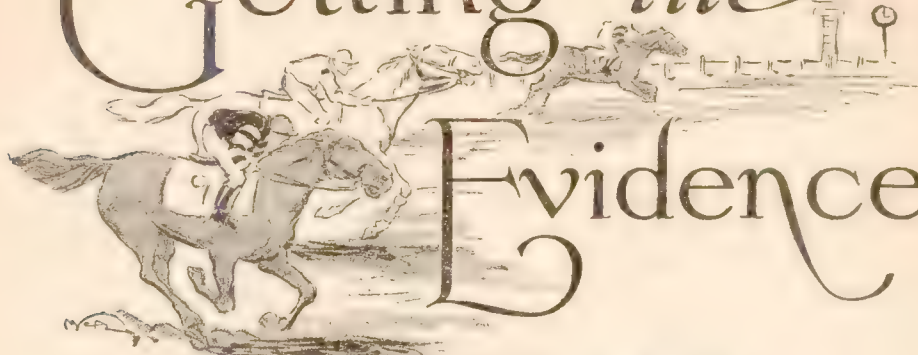
"A GLORIOUS FOOL"

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

Author of "David Vallory," etc.

BEGINS OCTOBER 4

Getting the Evidence



by Raymond J. Brown

WELL, the big boss, who's Horace P. Giles (Giles Confidential Detective Service, Inc., Investigations Quietly Conducted, Rates Reasonable), he calls me and Ed into the office and he says:

"Men," he says—he always calls us "men" when it's business; when it's just about how sorry he is that his last client ain't kicked in yet—and would we mind lettin' this week's pay go over to next Saturday—it's "boys" he calls us. Anyhow: "Men," he says, "I got a big and important case for you—a big and important case."

"We're the boys—" I start to boast, Ed just standin' there grinnin' like the simpleton he is.

"I know all about that," says the boss. "The Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association," he goes on, "has retained the service of my agency"—him, me, and Ed is the agency, so I snicker—"of my agency to aid it in crushin' the gamblin' evil, which is"—he looks at a paper on his desk—"which is underminin' the morals of this city," he reads.

"Sounds like quite a job," I observe.

"It is," nods the boss. "What it means is that we've been hired to close up the poolrooms."

"I never heard of a little session with the cue hurtin' nobody," I says, innocent like.

"It ain't that kind of pool," says the boss, lookin' like he was wonderin' whether

I was kiddin' him. "It's places where they bet on horse races," he explains.

"Oh," I says, still playin' the boob. "And does the Anti-Vice Club tell us where they are, or do we have to go out and—"

"Joe Conner," interrupts the boss, speakin' severe like. "This ain't no picnic I'm handin' you—it's a job! If you think that because it's concerned with a light form of human endeavor like illegitimized bettin' on horse races, it's to be a joyful vacation for you—and this," he says as an afterthought, pointin' to Ed, "you're wrong. It's up to you to go out and get evidence—just like it was a divorce case. Get me?"

"Oh, sure!" I tell him.

"Very well, then," he says, "the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association tells me that Handbook Charlie's runnin' full blast over McNally's harness store—takin' bets on three tracks, and handlin' a play that runs into thousands."

"That sounds terrible!" I assert. "Well," I add, "they ain't goin' to run no unfairious and degraded gamblin' schemes for bilkin' the honest workin'man of his hard-earned cush in this town—not while Joe Conner—"

"To the sewer with that!" breaks in the boss. "Get out of here and get busy! Mind you, now, I wants results!"

"Ha, ha!" I laughs. "Ha, ha!"

"I don't see the joke," says the boss.

"No?" I ask him. "Have you ever been in a poolroom?" I inquire.

"Huh? That's none of your business!" he snaps.

"Oh, all right," I says. "I ain't tryin' to lay bare any shameful secrets of your past," I tell him, "only, if you've ever been in a poolroom, you'll remember that they're liable to look with suspicion on a guy that ain't got no money."

"That's right, too," says the boss. "Look here," he bids, pullin' out the top drawer of his desk. "The Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association has give me a hundred bucks for expenses. Here's fifty," he says, strip-pin' off a bunch of tens and fives. "Go down to Charlie's and get a couple of bets down. That 'll be your evidence," he says.

"Suppose I lose the money," I suggest.

"If you lose more than a couple of bucks, you're crazy!" says the boss. "I think I'm givin' you a pretty fair shake—splittin' fifty-fifty with you on the expense money. What I give you is *yours*!" he says—just like I didn't know it already.

"Maybe this won't be enough to get evidence with," I says.

"Maybe it won't," says the boss, turnin' his back.

"Say!" Ed wants to know. "Where do I come in?"

"See Joe," says the boss. "Now get out of here—both of you."

"What do we do when we get evidence?" I ask. "Tip off the police?"

"Blazes—no!" cries the boss. "You're workin' for the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association. They want to tell the police themselves."

"I'm on," I tell him.

When we're outside Ed says to me:

"Pretty soft! All we got to do is lose ourselves for a couple of days—we can go to the movies or anything."

"How d'you make that out?" I ask him.

"Well," he says, "as long as we know that Handbook Charlie *is* runnin' all we got to do is stall around till we're ready to hand him in."

"We don't know he's runnin'," I object.

"But you've been to his place yourself—to play horses."

"I've never been there in my life!" I tell him. "Remember that now, if anybody asks you—I've never been there in my life!"

"But when you know—" he starts to say.

"A detective ain't supposed to know nothin'," I inform him. "His business is to find things out."

"But—"

"But nothin'! Just keep your mouth shut. Here—stuff this in it," I tell him, givin' him one of the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association's five-spots.

It worked; Ed shut up.

Well, we get into Charlie's, and there's a million people there. They're makin' bets like money was dirt.

I hop over to a telephone and calls up the boss.

"I seen a lot of fellers goin' into the rooms over McNally's harness shop," I tell him. "Maybe Charlie *is* open there. I can't get in, though. I'm goin' to stick around," I add, "and see what I can pick up."

I find a horse named Cherry Ripe, who's runnin' in the first race at Louisville is six to win, three a place, and eight to five to show, and it occurs to me that maybe here's a chance of pickin' up about a century and a half's worth of evidence.

"Cherry Ripe?" I says to one of the workers.

"How much?" he asks me.

"A quarter of a yard," I tell him, strip-pin' off two tens and a five.

"Cherry Ripe; a hundred and fifty against twenty-five!" he calls out as he slips me the ticket.

"What're you goin' to do with that five I give you?" I ask Ed.

"Keep it for expenses," he says.

"Are you?" I ask him. "Give it to me!" I order.

He does, and I bet it for him on Cherry Ripe.

Pretty soon the machine begins tickin'.

"They're off at Louisville!" comes the announcement. (*Tick, tick, tick.*) "At the quarter—Cherry Ripe by four lengths! (*Tick, tick, tick.*) At the half—Cherry Ripe by six!"

"Looks like the evidence we'll get here is the kind our legal friends call 'material'" I whisper to Ed.

Tick, tick, tick goes the machine again.

"In the stretch—Cherry Ripe by ten!"

Ten lengths! Some evidence!

"Here's your winner," calls out the guy who's translatin' what the telegraph instrument has to offer. "Cherry Ripe!" he adds.

I get my hundred and seventy-five and Ed's thirty-five, thirty of which I give him; then I go to the telephone again.

"I just met a feller," I tell the boss, "who says that *maybe* he can get us into Charlie's place—to-morrow. We'd better stick around," I says. "We're pickin' up a lot of stuff."

"Be careful," the boss advises. "Don't try to bust your way in."

"Oh, I wouldn't!" I assure him.

"That's right; just remember the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association wants to engineer the pinch. There's five hundred in it for us—for me, I mean—if they do."

"Five hundred's a lot of money," I remark. "No matter where it comes from."

I venture a hundred of what I've just won on Cherry Ripe on the chances of a nag named Dreamy Waltz in the second event at Louisville. I try to get Ed to string with me for twenty-five, but he'll only stand for ten. Dreamy Waltz waltzes in, enrichin' me thereby to the amount of four hundred seeds. I call up the boss again.

"I just met the guy that was goin' to get me into Charlie's," I tell him. "He says now that there's nothin' doin'."

"Say! What's the idea of all the telephonin'?" asks the boss.

"I thought you'd like to know that I'm pickin' up stuff right along."

"A fine lot of stuff!" he jeers. "You'll use up all the profits in this case on phone calls!"

"Not *all*," I tell him, hangin' up hastily so's to get the best of the bettin' on the third race.

I cash again—two hundred this time. It's beginnin' to look like a good afternoon. I'm thinkin' of little birdies singin' and pretty flowers growin'. Seven hundred and fifty bucks on three bets! Even Ed is there a hundred and twenty winner as a result of a plunge of a quarter of a century on the last baby.

"A very interestin' case," I remark to Ed. "The results seem to be worth all the hard work we're doin' on it!"

"You wouldn't call this workin' hard!" observes Ed—serious, too! "I like it."

"Good!" I approve.

"Well, I guess we've got enough evidence now," says Ed, inspectin' his bank-roll.

"The less guessin' and the less thinkin' you do," I tell him, "the more successful this case is liable to turn out!"

"But, gee, Joe!" says Ed. "We've found they're takin' bets here; we've gathered evidence enough to prove it—"

"Say!" I interrupt, haulin' out my roll, which I admit was beginnin' to be a pretty sight to see, "I'd look fine handin' this over to be marked Exhibit A for identification in the case of the People *vs.* Charles Scully, alias Handbook Charlie, wouldn't I?"

"Ain't that what you're goin' to do with it?" asks Ed.

"The same day I cut off my right hand I am!" I tell him.

"You're goin' to *keep* it?"

"As I hope to hold on to my life!"

"And I'm goin' to keep what *I* win?"

"Unless you lose it here," I tell him.

Ain't he the stupidest guy! Always *has* to have things explained to him!

The next mornin' the boss, of course, wants to know all about it. I oblige with a story about hidin' in a doorway opposite McNally's harness shop and watchin' the fellers goin' in and out the place that's suspected of bein' Charlie's.

"It's a poolroom all right, then?" asks the boss.

"It might be," I admit doubtful like. "Of course, we wasn't able to get in, but it looked like a poolroom crowd, all right. Or maybe the kind of a crowd you'd see goin' to church."

"Fine work!" exclaims the boss, rubbin' his hands. "I'll have a good report to give the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association to-day. Was there anything else you picked up that I could give them?" he asks.

"Not a thing!" I assure him, feelin' in my pocket to see whether the eight hundred and sixty which was the net returns of yesterday's play is safe. "Not a thing that I'd care to give them!"

"How much did you spend?" asks the boss in a sharp voice.

"Not a cent!" I says, "except, of course, what it cost me to telephone. Look!" I direct, takin' out fifty bucks which I had in a certain pocket for that purpose. "Here's the half-century you handed me yesterday."

"Joe Conner," says the boss, "you'd better be more careful—or I'll suspect you're gettin' honest!"

"Fear not!" I promise him. "I'll never disgrace you like that!"

We go out huntin' for evidence again that afternoon, and get lots of it—twelve hundred and sixty for me, and four hundred for Ed, who ain't playin' 'em very hard. Ed wanted to fit himself out in a new set of draperies; also kicks and a lid, but I put the boots to that proposition.

"You'll queer the thing," I tell him. "Old Giles 'll know you never saved up for them out of your salary."

"But how 're we goin' to—"

"When we start to lose, it 'll be time to hand Charlie up to the Anti-Vicers," I says, knowin' what was in the boob's mind.

"But suppose we don't lose?"

"Suppose you wake up some mornin' and find you have brains! The shock 'll kill you!" I tell him.

"But I don't see—"

"I know it," I says.

"That's the hardest place to get into I ever see!" I tell the boss next mornin'. "They've got the toughest guy on the door! I think he'd kill a feller that tried to get by him!"

"Say!" says the boss, "where *was* you guys yesterday? The president of the Anti-Vice and Gamblin' Association was in to see me last night, and he said he was down opposite Charlie's and didn't see nobody watchin' the place."

"A fine pair of detectives we'd be to let ourselves get discovered!" I says. "We was hidin'—of course!"

"I'm goin' down with you this afternoon and look the ground over," the boss decides. "It seems to me you guys ain't gettin' much action in the case."

"Don't!" I cry out, horrified. "You mustn't! You'd queer the whole works! Two of us is bad enough—but three! They'd get on to us right off!" I says. "And you never seen such a tough mob;

they'd kill you as quick as they'd look at you! Desperate guys!" I describes them.

"On the level?" asks the boss, weakenin'.

"I'll leave it to Ed," I says, kickin' Stupid on the shin.

"That's right!" he says, noddin' his head. "They's the toughest bunch of birds in that room that I ever did see."

"In that room!" breaks in the boss.

"He means he sees them goin' in and comin' out," I hasten to explain. "Ain't that it, Ed?"

"Sure!" says Ed. He'd agree to anything—either way.

"There's somethin' phony in this," decides the boss, lookin' at me hard. "Listen here, Joe Conner—this bunk about not gettin' in there has got to stop! Why, you little weasel, you could get into a bank vault! Now, either you get into Charlie's room this afternoon, so I'll have somethin' to tell them Anti-Vice people—when I ask them for more expense money—or you'll hunt another job!"

"I was just goin' to tell you," I says. "That bird that was goin' to get us in the first day—I met him yesterday, and he said he thought it would be all right for this afternoon."

"See that it is," says the boss.

Well, in the first race that afternoon I'm down for half a thousand on a nag that cops at three to one. Can you imagine? Me pickin' up kale in thousand-dollar chunks!

"Cripe!" I says to Ed. "What am I to do? If I tell the boss I'm in here, he'll want to tell the Anti-Vice Club. They'll tip off the police, the place will be pulled—and we can't play the races no more!"

"Well," says Ed, "that's what we're here for!"

"That was before we was winnin'," I tell him.

"Couldn't you give the boss a cut on your winnin's?" asks fat-head.

"Yeh—and my right eye, too!"

"Well, blow your job, then," suggests my bright assistant. "You're doin' pretty good here."

"A feller with as much brains as you," I inform him, "ought to be locked up! A fine sucker play that 'd be! I'm a couple

of thousand ahead, I know—but that ain't goin' to last me forever. The boss don't pay me so good, but he does it fairly often. Besides, there's nothin' to stop him from comin' here and pullin' the place himself."

"That's so," admits Ed.

"I could have bet you'd agree with me!" I tell him, makin' for the phone.

"Well," I tell the boss, "we're in."

"Gettin' evidence?" he wants to know.

"Naw!" I says, disgusted. "I think they're on to us. If they ever *was* playin' the races here, they've stopped now."

"What *are* they doin'?" asks the boss.

"Why—er—"

"What?"

"They—they're—"

"Hurry up!" he snaps.

"They're — er — holdin' a prayer-meetin'!"

It was the first thing that popped into my head.

"What!"

"Holdin' a prayer-meetin'," I repeat, brazen as I can. "Want to hear them?" I ask, openin' the door of the booth and motionin' Ed over.

"Say a prayer!" I whisper to him when he arrives—"out loud!"

"Hah?"

"A prayer—say one—out loud!"

"God bless our home!" he shouts.

"Hear that?" I ask the boss.

"I heard somebody cussin'," says he. "Say—you! There's somethin' phony about all this! I'm comin' down to look the place over."

"Don't! Please don't!" I shriek into the phone, but I'm too late—he's hung up.

"We're in for it now," I tell Ed. "The boss is comin' down."

"I told you to hand in this place two days ago," he says.

"Let's sneak another bet over—while we can," I say.

I'm just in time to slip in a five-hundred-dollar wager on a horse named Jack Kelly when they quit takin' bets on the first race. The nag cops at eight to five—eight hundred bucks for fater! I get my dough—in a hurry.

"Well, what next?" I ask Ed. "The boss 'll be here any minute. We're caught

—with the goods," I says, feelin' the roll in my pocket. "He'll never trust us again!"

"He never did!" remarks Ed, which, I don't mind tellin' you, was the first and only bright sayin' I ever heard from his lips.

I think for a second.

"There's only one thing to do," I decide. "We've got to beat it and head off the boss. We can tell him they just started takin' bets after I phoned. Then we can all go to the Anti-Vicers, hand Handbook Charlie up to justice—and all will be well!"

"Joe," says Ed, "you're the smartest feller I ever knew!"

"Well, come on," I tell him, grabbin' him by the wrist. "Let's go!"

We start for the door, and we've almost reached it when—

Down in the street an automobile engine starts puffin'. A bell sounds—and I know there's only one kind of a wagon in the world that carries that kind of a gong! There's the sound of heavy feet on the pavement. Loud voices is raised in angry shouts. The gentle patter of a couple of axes is heard against the street door. Fellers who was in the room start goin' out windows, through the skylight—they was disappearin' out of everything that was open—except Ed's mouth! The lookout busts into the room.

"Beat it! The cops!" he yells like he was furnishin' news that nobody was aware of.

"We can stick, can't we?" asks Ed.

"Stick—hell!" I shout, pushin' him toward a window.

"But we're here on duty," he objects.

"So 're the cops!" I snap. "And in cases like this they do it with their clubs!"

I squirm through the mob and leap from the window. Ed follows me. We land on top of a woodshed a floor below, jarrin' everything but the money in our pockets.

Somethin' whizzes by my ear; then bang! it goes through the roof of the woodshed. It was noffin' but the telegraph instruments and the table and batteries that was attached to them. A couple of tons of other light articles follow. For a second I thought of stickin' around to see if they'd throw any money out; but I decide that the trouble of takin' it out of the safe would be too great

to warrant the risk of bein' beaned by it, and I decide to flee.

I went over a dozen fences, and, although I never stopped runnin' until I reached the office, Ed was there ahead of me.

"Play dead!" I caution him, and that's what we're both doin' when the boss comes in about fifteen minutes later, followed by a shriveled old bird with white whiskers.

"Huh! There you are, eh?" begins the boss, blood in his eye. "A fine pair of—"

"Didn't we do that slick?" I ask him, grinnin' like I'd just found a million somewheres.

"Why, you cheatin' little rat—" screeches the boss, movin' toward me like he was goin' to take me by the throat.

"I guess Ed and me is the boys that can manage things!" I tell him, never lettin' the grin slip—although I was scared to death! "We're the fancy little fixers! I told you Handbook Charlie couldn't run no game in this town after I got on his trail! Gee, it was pretty! Wasn't it, Ed? You should have—"

"What the devil are you talkin' about?" the boss inquires, lookin' at me puzzled.

My grin's real now; at least I'd took his mind off beatin' me up!

"Why, didn't you hear?" I ask. "Didn't you hear about the raid that me and Ed staged down at Handbook Charlie's?"

"Raid that *you* staged!" shouts the boss.

"Sure!" I tells him. I looks at the old guy. I'd sized him up right as bein' one of the Anti-Vicers. "I'll bet you did, mister—er—I didn't quite catch your name," I tell him.

"Simkins," he says.

"Mr. Simkins," I says, bowin'.

"Do you mean to tell me—" begins the boss.

"Sure!" I break in. "It was the only thing we could do. We got a tip that Handbook Charlie was goin' to move, so we had to call up the police. They come right around," I says.

"Aw, you can't—"

The boss is pretty thick himself sometimes!

"*Sh-h-h!*" I caution him, slippin' him a wink. "Yes," I says, "me and Ed was the boys that done it, and I guess you can collect your five hundred from Mr. Simple now. You're satisfied, ain't you, Mr. Simcox?"

"Simkins," he says.

"Well, you're satisfied the way things turned out, ain't you?" I ask him.

He starts to grin all over his face.

"Clever!" he says, noddin' to me. "You're a young man of great resourcefulness!"

"How much you'll never know!" I assure him.

"Giles," says the old bird to the boss, "you are to be congratulated on havin' such a perspicacious and brilliant young man in your employ! He handled our case with remarkable tact; I might say he has strategic genius of no mean order. Here is your five hundred dollars, Giles," he says, pullin' a bundle of centuries out of his wallet and handin' it to the boss. "I should suggest that you reward these young men generously from the proceeds of this so successful—er—coup. Here, young man," he says, handin' me a ten-spot, "divide this with your colleague."

"Oh, no, thank you, sir!" I says, pushin' the ten back. "I'm sure Mr. Giles will—er—reward us generously!"

And, even if he didn't, it wasn't such a bad job—takin' it all the way through!

Let's all be sure to go down

"The Red Road"

With George C. Shedd

September 27

Fortune's Favorite Child

by Lloyd Kinmundy



IF you had seen Charley Frisbee, that cold winter night—Mr. Charles Warren Frisbee, he used to be—slinking along the deserted street in his threadbare coat, you would never have guessed that, by all the rules, he should have been a most fortunate man. His appearance did not indicate it.

Yet, if worshipping faithfully at the shrine of the mysterious Goddess of Luck, whoever she may be; if observing all the signs and omens by which a prudent man is warned of the approach of evil; if performing all the little rites that are supposed to ward off misfortune and bring good luck—if these things are to be properly rewarded, Charley Frisbee should have been Fortune's favorite child.

His figure was tall and spare, and his thin, black coat seemed scanty protection in the chilling wind. His face habitually wore an apologetic smile, as if he were apologizing to the world in general for the fact that his signs and omens had brought him no better fortune. Nevertheless, repeated disappointment never disturbed his faith, and for the frequent failure of his signs he always had an excuse.

Some men go after bad luck like a terrier after a rat. With angry growls they attack it fiercely, and it is a fight to a finish. Such bold spirits believe they are masters of their fate and captains of their souls, and will fight to prove it.

But others, like our friend Charley Frisbee, take a more propitiating course, and try, by friendly concessions to unseen powers, to avert the arrows of outrageous fortune, and secure the patronizing friendship of a lucky star.

So when Charley lost in the crap game, or when pitching pennies went against him, he never got mad and kicked things over, and swore it was a rotten game, and that he'd never play again, as you or I would do—that might give him bad luck—he just smiled an apologetic smile for having been in at the wrong time, and patiently wondered what omen he could possibly have overlooked that would have warned him of disaster.

Like this was Charley Frisbee. By all the little attentions and ceremonies which, tradition tells us, ward off evil and secure good luck, he tried to win the favor of the Goddess of Fortune, and secure a safe and happy passage through this parlous vale of tears.

Charley had a rather good situation as collector of bills for a small mercantile house; but one day, when he was just outside the office door, starting on his daily rounds, he was called back to receive another document which had been overlooked when the usual batch of bills had been handed to him that morning.

This made it necessary—as everybody

knows—that, once back in the office, he must sit down, take off his hat, count ten, and expectorate. This to remove the curse of coming back. Otherwise he might surely expect bad luck.

Charley performed these rites as furtively as possible; but even then was detected by some of the clerks, who perhaps were on the lookout for him, and was loudly "ragged" for his superstition, as they ignorantly called it.

But worse than the laughter of the clerks—when he glanced up at the glass door of the inner office he saw the scowling face of the manager, whose attention had been attracted by the noise in the outer office. The manager was one of the rat-dog kind that grabs fate by the back of the neck and shakes it to pieces, and—well—that was the last day Charley collected bills for that firm.

On the eve of starvation, almost, Charley got another "job" at collecting. But an inconsiderate painter found it necessary to put his ladder over the office door one day, and poor Charley couldn't get in for two hours. Because there can be no worse sign than walking under a ladder, you know.

He lost another place on account of the well-known aversion of the Goddess of Fortune to the number thirteen; and when we make his acquaintance, this cold winter's evening, he is slinking along in his threadbare coat, keeping as much under the lee of the fences and buildings as possible, his conciliatory smile a little worn and wan, for it is hard to smile in the evening when you haven't eaten since the night before—slinking along and saying to himself that if at the next corner, where the buildings open out to the sky, he sees the new moon over his right shoulder—which shoulder he keeps carefully turned in the direction where the moon ought to be—if he does so see it, that will indicate that good fortune has him in charge, and he will go down to Henry Jones's, where the sign says "Eat," and ask for a square meal—same to be charged up.

Our friend Charley was so intent upon his own business that at first he did not notice the old gentleman who was walking

ahead of him, but when his eye did light on this person, Charley immediately interpreted a peculiarity of movement which, to a novice in the art of conciliating fate and warding off evil fortune, might have been considered most puzzling.

The old gentleman was well wrapped up and protected from the raw wind in his greatcoat, and looked as comfortable as could be expected for one who had to be out on such a night. It was not his dress that attracted Charley's attention; it was the way he was walking over the large flagstones that formed the sidewalk in this rather ancient part of the town.

The old man kept his eyes on the ground, and, stepping from side to side, seemed to be picking his way as one crossing a stream on stepping-stones. An ordinary pedestrian not skilled in the occult ways of propitiating fortune, would have seen no necessity for this care in stepping; for the sidewalk was not worse than such old-fashioned stonework usually is. To be sure, there were occasional icy places, but their avoidance required no such erratic movements as the old man indulged in.

As a matter of fact, he paid no attention to the ice at all, but stepped recklessly upon it whenever it was in the way of his course.

"Wise old guy," said Charley to himself. "He knows better than to step on any of the cracks. I don't know, but I may have stepped on one of 'em myself, when that gust of wind pushed me along back there in the dark. It was so black I couldn't see very well. I ought to 'a' been more careful. I do hope to goodness I didn't do it. It ud be pretty tough to get the moon and everything else all right, and then, after all, get knocked out of the eats at old Jones's lunch room just for havin' stepped on a crack."

Charley was so worried over these disturbing thoughts that for a few minutes he forgot all about the old man. Then the sudden gyrations of the figure caught his eye.

The old man had stepped on an icy place. A few desperate reverse motions of the legs, trying to catch himself; each time the heels striking too far forward to gain

any hold on the icy surface; until finally the heels could not be put back quickly enough to touch anything at all, and the old man bumped to the ground.

It was a heavy fall, and the old man lay so still that Charley's heart involuntarily jumped up into his throat. Thus startled, he stood still for a minute, and then made his way to the old man's side, skipping carefully over the cracks in the walk, now to this side, now to that, as quickly as he could go.

When he stood over the old man he called cheerfully:

"Hey, sir! Are you hurt?"

There was no answer, and Charley looked helplessly up and down the street for assistance. Accidents were not in his line. He always wanted to run away when he saw one. The sight of blood made him sick, and he never knew what to do, except to feel sorry when any one was hurt. Nevertheless, our friend was very sympathetic with physical suffering. He suffered himself whenever he saw it, and perhaps it was this excess of sympathy that made him want to run away when he saw an accident.

He glanced up and down the street in the vain hope that some one would come and examine the old man, and ascertain how badly he was hurt. No one was in sight, however, in either direction, and so Charley reluctantly knelt by the prostrate figure and touched the old man's face. The old man was breathing; there could be no doubt about that; so it was certain that he was not dead; but when Charley spoke to him again there was no more response than the first time.

Charley had read somewhere about an accident where they felt the victim's heart; and not knowing what else to do, he unbuttoned the warm coat and put his hand inside the vest, where he could feel the pulsations that indicate life.

But he felt something else! In an inside pocket he felt a flat pocketbook nestling close to the old man's breast. Then a thought struck him that froze his blood. What if some one should see him here, bending over this prostrate man whose coat he had unfastened? Would it not be sus-

pected that he had a guilty hand in putting the man on the ground? Would it not be a very suspicious thing to find this threadbare man—this tramp, you might say—bending over the unconscious figure of a well-dressed stranger?

What should he do if he saw any one coming? Should he jump up and run? He would be caught—sure. Should he say the old man fell down, and that he was trying to help him? If the old man came to all right, he might corroborate that statement; but if he didn't come to, on one would ever believe it.

Then again, the old man might never come to—might even die, Charley thought, and he himself might be hung for murder! He worked himself into a panic of fear. He must run for it—before anybody came.

That, he finally decided, was the safest way.

But what was in that flat pocketbook, anyway? If he must run for it, why not take the pocketbook with him? The old man was only stunned, probably, and very likely would come around all right in a little while. He could do nothing for the prostrate man, except to go and hunt up some one and tell them that a man had fallen there; and even that might be at considerable risk to himself. Some one would be along shortly, anyway. The old man was well dressed and prosperous-looking, and could well spare the pocketbook, he was sure.

Charley glanced guiltily up and down the street; then carefully put his hand back inside the old man's coat, and clutching the pocketbook, drew it forth and sprang to his feet. He decided to go in the opposite direction from Henry Jones's this time, and ran hastily to the first corner, being careful, however, not to step on any cracks. In this crisis in his life he couldn't afford to take any chances. Once around the corner he slowed down to an ordinary walk, and finally stopped under a lamp-post to examine his booty.

The wallet seemed to be a new one, and on opening the flap there was disclosed a roll of new bills. That was all. There were no cards or clippings or other scraps, such as so often lumber up a man's pocket-

book, and the smaller compartment contained no "change."

After carefully looking up and down the street to make sure he was not observed, Charley timidly drew out the roll of money. The greenbacks were all new, and of the same denomination—one-dollar bills. Charley counted them—one—two—three—and on up to thirteen. Yes, thirteen! Exactly thirteen!

Charley folded up the money slowly, stuffed it back into the wallet, and, leaning against the lamp-post, gazed absently across the street. Thirteen bills! Exactly thirteen! Could it be an omen? It must be an omen!

Whoever heard of a wallet, and a new wallet at that, containing exactly thirteen one-dollar bills, and all the bills new—and nothing else?

Suddenly the full horror of the situation rushed upon him. He had committed a crime! He had stolen! And he had stolen *thirteen!* It was an omen! Of course it was an omen! A frenzy of fear seized him. If he could only avert the catastrophe this fatal thirteen forewarned! Oh, if he had never touched the thing! If he could just undo it all! If he could only put the wallet back where he got it!

He ran swiftly to the corner and looked up the street. Yes, the huddled figure lay there yet on the ground. Tiptoeing, but running, and carefully avoiding the cracks, he soon reached its side, and knelt beside it.

The old man was still unconscious, fortunately; breathing quietly; and Charley carefully replaced the wallet poisoned with the accursed thirteen, in the pocket from which he had taken it. As he did so a deep sigh escaped from the old man, and he opened his eyes.

"Are you much hurt, sir?" asked Charley solicitously.

The old man thought it over a while before he answered.

"Just let me rest a minute," he said. "My head's still goin' round and round, but I guess I'll be all right shortly. I made a misstep."

"Yes, sir. I think you stepped on a crack," said Charley.

"By George, son! How did you know that?" and the old man, in his sudden interest, pushed himself almost to a sitting posture, propping himself on either side with a hand on the flagstone pavement. "How did you happen to know that? How is it you don't say I fell because I stepped on the ice?"

"Well, sir," said Charley, "I know, of course, that you did step on the ice, too, but I was speaking of the original cause of your fall. I don't think, sir, that you would have fallen from stepping on the ice if you hadn't first stepped on a crack."

"Young man," said the older one, evidently much pleased at our friend's diagnosis of the cause of his fall, "I see you are a person of understanding and discernment, and I am glad that fate has decreed that we should meet. As a matter of fact, I did step on a crack, in spite of all my care not to do so, and very soon after that I got my fall. It always so happens with me. The most unlucky thing I can do is to step on a crack in a flagstone pavement. Something always happens to me, young man, if I do. Do you find it so with yourself?"

"Exactly so," said Charley; "and I think, sir, that stepping on a crack in a flagstone pavement should be a warning to any one. The trouble is that most persons are so careless and unobserving that they do not see these things as we do, or else they recklessly disregard signs that would cause a prudent man to be careful."

"You are right, young man," returned the old gentleman. "I believe life is full of signs and warnings, if we only understood them all. Sometimes it is very hard to read them—the signs seem to conflict. My daughter laughs at me and calls me superstitious; just the same, I always have regarded it foolhardy to fly in the face of omens. Good luck and bad luck are so mixed sometimes that it is very confusing. I have had my fall, which was bad luck, and I have had the pleasure of meeting you, which I consider good luck."

Charley bowed his acknowledgment of the compliment, and tried to convey by a look that he was thoroughly in sympathy with the views expressed.

"It is a strange meeting," continued the old man, "and yet—now I think of it—I can account for it easily. As I said before, the most sinister sign I can encounter is stepping on a crack in a flagstone pavement. I seldom come down this street for the very reason that the pavement is full of cracks, but to-night I risked it. However, I did what I could to guard myself before I started out.

"You see, thirteen is my lucky number. It has proved itself to be so over and over again. I know it is unlucky for some, but it is lucky for me. So this evening, before I left home, I put thirteen new one-dollar bills in a flat pocketbook, which I placed in an inside pocket. This device has proved effective with me before, and I think it may have proved of benefit to-night. For, somehow, I feel as if that thirteen dollars has something to do with your being here with me now, and I count it a piece of good luck to meet a man who has so many of my own ideas as you have, my young friend. Now help me to get on my feet, and perhaps down on Washington Street we may be able to find a carriage to take me to my home."

Assisted by our friend Charley, the old man—whose name, it transpired, was Mr. Abram DuPont, of Adams Street—was able to make his way along until a passing carriage took them in, Mr. DuPont insisting that his new friend should accompany him home.

On the road home, various charms and signs were discussed too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say that Mr. DuPont's liking for our friend steadily increased. The older man had never found any one who shared his own superstitions so fully as our Charley, and the younger man even told him of some rules and charms of which he had never heard. Charley's unfortunate circumstances were also disclosed, and the numerous signs and omens that preceded his misfortunes were recounted and discussed.

Mr. DuPont's residence on Adams Street was a large house of the brownstone variety. Charley assisted the old man in at the door, which was opened by a neat maid in a cap.

"Where is Miss Martha, Adelaide?"

asked Mr. DuPont, and then exclaimed, "Ah, there you are!" as a dream of female loveliness, dressed in something white and fluffy, floated out of the library.

"This is my daughter Martha," said Mr. DuPont. "Martha, this is my new secretary, Mr. Frisbee. Ah—ah—not a word," holding up a warning hand at our Charley, "I am determined it shall be so. We can talk over terms later on—but I am determined it shall be so. A man of your intellect can take many burdens off my shoulders; and besides, the whole circumstance of our meeting—the fight between good luck and bad luck—seems to me like an omen that cannot, indeed, be disregarded."

"Oh, father! Omens! Omens! Always omens! You'll go crazy on them," said the daughter. "But," extending her hand to Charley, "I'm glad to see Mr. Frisbee, just the same; and I'm glad you're to have a secretary. You certainly need one."

Two months later, behold our Charley—Mr. Charles Warren Frisbee, if you please—as he takes a few minutes' rest on the chaise longue in his dressing-room before going down to dinner. His head rests back luxuriously in the cushions as he thoughtfully puffs out little rings from his cigarette. His long form is incased in an evening suit from one of the best makers; in fact, his whole appearance is correct and elegant—except that if we look carefully above the patent-leather pump on the left foot, we will see that the silk sock is on wrong side out. It was placed that way accidentally, and Charley—beg pardon!—Mr. Charles Warren Frisbee—wouldn't change it for the world. It is a sign of good luck.

"Well," he is saying to himself as the rings from his cigarette curl slowly upward, "it's damned funny about that thirteen. He does seem to have luck with it. He got me by it! I wonder if it could be lucky for him and unlucky for me at the same time. I never felt so queer in my life as I did when I had that thirteen dollars in my hand. Anyway, I'm going to select some day that ain't the thirteenth when I tell the old man I'm going to be his son-in-law."



The Log-Book

By the Editor

THE older one grows, the more wisdom one is supposed to absorb. I say "supposed," because there is a certain element about added years that seems to make for prejudice against new things, innovations of any sort. What is the result? Slipping into a rut and sticking there until one becomes permeated by dry rot.

Long-time readers of THE ARGOSY can vouch for it how sedulously this magazine has avoided that sort of thing. Started back in 1882, change after change has been made in the publication to keep it up with the times, and the spirit of youth has ever been present in dictating the editorial policy.

What is the result? Success perches upon its banner, and its friends can be counted among those of all ages who receive its weekly visits with joy all over the world, as the date-lines on Log-Book letters will testify.



Imagine, if you will, Cleopatra, Circe, Delilah, and all the rest of the beguiling women of old times—then add a touch of Cæsar, Napoleon, and Captain Kidd—and you have a fairly accurate composite of—

"PRINCESS OF PLUNDER"

BY C. ELEANOR SPEARS and RAYMOND S. SPEARS

It is warrant enough to say that this is by the authors of "Islands of Stone," that strangely captivating romance of the wild which earned so deserved a popularity. The same breadth is here—the same vision—the same splendid handling of men and situations and nature at its ripest and fullest and best and worst. It may also serve as a fillip to your interest to say that in the hands of these capable craftsmen, even so prosaic a thing as an inventory, for instance, may be interesting—and exciting. This story will be published as a five-part serial in THE ARGOSY, beginning September 20.



Into a pit as deep as the average sky-scraper is tall; a pit of blackness at whose bottom there sounded the rushing thunder of an avalanche of water—this was his introduction to—

"THE HOODOO MINE"

BY GEORGE C. JENKS

Author of "Not According to Queensbury," "Fathoms Deep," etc.

For in those whispering galleries of dread there abode a mystery, coiled, like a striking snake, a menace as treacherous and deadly as the hand and brain that devised it, ruthless, implacable. The withered hand—the black curse? Perhaps. At least

that was what the superstitious miners called it; and for a time it baffled even his supreme resourcefulness and skill; lost in a labyrinth of darkness and doubt, until the sound in the silence, like the muffled throbbing of a mighty pulse, gave him the clue. This will appear as a complete novelette in *THE ARGOSY* for September 20.



Seldom have I been so moved by a piece of fiction as when I read William Merriam Rouse's powerful tale of the Canadian woods, "THE SNARE," listed for next week's *ARGOSY*. Here is a drama of fierce encounter, heart-racking jealousy, and an outcome I shall not spoil by giving you the faintest hintings of. In "MANY TRAILS," by Frank Blighton, you will find a detective tale of unusual quality and background, inasmuch as it has to do with the mail service. And for a sea yarn I can strongly recommend Kenneth MacNichol's "HOME FOR BREAKFAST": no deep-water narrative of a mighty vessel encountering mid-ocean perils, but a graphically breathless portrayal of the fearsome experiences that befell a scowman when his dirt-laden barge broke loose from the tow in a December gale.



CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF "GREEN SPIDERS"

Newman, California.

When I found Alfred Pettibone was to have a story in your publication, I subscribed for a year, and have read "Green Spiders" with much interest and enjoyment. Few of your contributors, in my opinion, have such command of language or such imagination. I hope to see more from his pen. "David Vallory" was also another of your best stories.

B. B.

GARRET SMITH'S NEXT STARTS OCTOBER 11

Pittston, Pennsylvania.

I am writing a few words of praise to your wonderful magazine. I have never seen a letter in the Log-Book from Pittston, and I suppose this will reach the waste-basket. I enjoyed such stories as "Forbidden Trails," "After a Million Years," and "A Miracle of Faith." But I have no kick against any of the stories. I like them all. When will we have another from Garret Smith?

E. J. M.

A HAPPY TRAIN DISCOVERY

Columbus, Ohio.

Well, I'm one of the thousands of champions of *THE ARGOSY* magazine. I have only been reading it for about a year, but I wish I had started sooner. I was riding from Detroit to Columbus one day, and the time seemed to just barely creep. I noticed a magazine on the seat next to me, and asked the lady if I could borrow it for a few minutes. Well, I read it all the way through from Toledo to Columbus, and now I get one every week. I will close by saying that if you lose the stories by Charles A. Seltzer, you lose the whole magazine. So hang on to him, Mr. Editor.

W. W.

MRS. KEITH IS A REAL PERSON

Chattanooga, Tennessee.

As I have been reading *THE ARGOSY* for several years, I think I should express my opinion in the Log-Book. *THE ARGOSY* certainly is the best

magazine going. I read all the stories, and don't care to kick against any of them. I always read the Log-Book first, and always find it enjoyable. Whether it is North or South it all is the good old U. S. A. "Bully Bess" is fine; "Beau Rand" has got me guessing as to how it is going to end.

DUKE MONTEAGLE.

P. S.—Is Mrs. E. C. Keith a myth, or is she really a person?

WHAT HE CONSIDERS REAL STORIES

Converse, Indiana.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* ever since January, 1915, and very seldom miss a number. One of the first stories was, I think, "The City of the Unknown." That was the first I read, and have been a constant reader ever since. It would take too long for me to try and name all of the stories that I think best, but I will give you a few of what I consider to be *real stories*: "After a Million Years," "The Hammer," "Peter the Brazen," "The Ship that Crumbled," "The Potter at the Wheel," "Green Spiders," and "The Duke of Chimney Butte." I think that G. W. Ogden is one of the best writers who has ever written for *THE ARGOSY*.

I think the Log-Book one of the best parts of your magazine, and have reasons strictly personal for liking it so well. Long live *THE ARGOSY*.

TENNYSON GRAVEN.

FAVORS SETTING THE IMAGI- NATION TO WORK

White Station, Kentucky.

Please find subscription to *THE ARGOSY*. The fact that I am renewing shows more plainly than words that I am pleased with the stories. Most of your subscribers clamor for sequels to various tales, but I occasionally like a tale which leaves something to the imagination. I still cherish in happy memory Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger" and "The Discourager of Hesitancy"; Bayard Taylor's "Who Was She?" "Marjory Daw," by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, though the latter is not akin to others. I like all

of your stories, possibly those of Achmed Abdullah, Burroughs, Franklin, and Lauriston better than any. Should you print this in the Log-Book, please use initials only.

J. H. M.

WANTS MORE HISTORICAL NOVELS

Frankfort Heights, Illinois.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for about three years, although I have not been a subscriber. I like your serials the best. Some of the best stories I read were: "A Soldier's Honor," "Riddle Gawne," "The Sword Lover," "Odds and the Man," and "The Listener." I don't care much for stories like "After a Million Years," by Garret Smith. His imagination ran away with him when he wrote that story. Give us some more historical novels like "Playing the Man" and "Embers of Empire." Your series, "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea," couldn't be beat. I think that Charles Alden Seltzer and George W. Ogden are the best Western story writers you have.

A. J. BARANOSKY.

DELIGHTS IN THE CLASH OF SWORDS

Seattle, Washington.

When I read the Log-Book, and see that some one wants you to cut out the serials, I see red. You cut out the serials, I'll cut out *THE ARGOSY*, so there. I wish it was all serials. The stories I like best, really, are where there is sword fighting. I like the stories by C. A. Seltzer all right, but all the heroes are just like Bill Hart. Fight with guns and fists. But when it comes to sword-clashing, boy, Bill would have to go in the background. You see, I was in love with Bill Hart once. Keep one going all the time like "Sword and Anvil."

I wrote you once before, and that was printed; don't know if this will be. Don't sign my name; people would think I was crazy. I am just

MOTHER OF MANY.

P. S.—I just wish the style would come back when men wore the silk breeches and powdered hair.

THANKS FOR THE COMPLIMENT

Elmira, New York.

I have failed to fulfil my promise of scoring at least once a month in the good old Log. However, from here on yours truly intends to make it a point to do so, providing the good old manager has no objections.

Among the stories to my liking in the late issues are: "Thumbs Down," "Beau Rand," "Fathoms Deep," "Bully Bess" sure was bully, and—well, to tell the truth, they are all good, so why not save the space for other readers? I will have to agree with Josephine Wiley—our manager has a man-sized job, and knows how to cover it in grand style. If Mr. H. L. Walker would keep his arguments on his chest, and take a little trip down East, he may be able to learn a few facts about police protection which might prove mighty useful in Toronto. If he does not approve of the present methods, why not make a

suggestion to the proper authorities in Toronto? He should bear in mind the fact that we are constantly facing signs, almost daily, with the words, "Safety First," upon them, and usually there are included the words, "Suggestions Welcomed."

MOBILE, alias THE PARROT.

A GRATIFIED CRAZE

Lamar, Colorado.

Have just finished reading *THE ARGOSY* for June 27, and consider all the stories the best ever. This isn't the first one I ever read, however. My father has taken *THE ARGOSY* for two years, and I haven't missed an issue. I think "Beau Rand" and "Thumbs Down" are fine; but I wonder if there ever was a man like *Beau Rand*. When I lived in the East I was positively crazy to meet a real cow-puncher; now I have seen a number of them, and they are just like any other men, only perhaps rougher. But I admire the easy-going, care-free manner of the Western men, and that is why I love the Western stories.

I would like very much to see more serials, such as "The Girl in Khaki" and "Blue Flames," as I don't care a great deal for short stories, although I am satisfied with *THE ARGOSY* as it is. My father likes Western stories, and also those of Asia and India and other foreign places. He has traveled extensively, and is somewhat of a critic, but all the stories so far have proved intensely interesting to him.

Well, must close for this time, as I have a number of chores to do. While dad is gone, I have to play the man; and I suppose this letter is taking up a lot of your most valuable time.

ARDELIA STULL.

PRAISING UP "THUMBS DOWN"

Erie, Pennsylvania.

Having read as much of the story entitled "Thumbs Down" as is printed in *THE ARGOSY* so far, I am prompted to say that it is one of the best and most interesting stories that I have ever read in your publication.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for some time, and am proud to say that I picked a real book.

Being a finger-print expert myself, I would have done just as the book reads; but if I had the paper that the former reporter found, I would be convinced as to which one to arrest and charge the crime with.

Newspapermen will soon be forced to absent themselves from murder cases if they are not careful. I learned this while at the annual meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, of which I am an honorary member. Things are going to change, and persons who have no right to know what is going on must keep in the dark until a responsible person reveals the truth.

When the next chapter is printed, I have no doubt but what a line on the real murderer will be had; and I think that the reporter will pony up that piece of paper he found with the print on. If he don't, I think the mystery will never be cleared, because the whole thing lies in that paper.

Trusting that you will agree with me, I am,
W. E. EBERHARDT.

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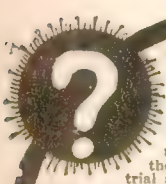
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
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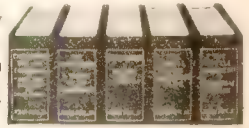
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